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Dissertation

PARADOX IN THE THOUGHT OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD

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ABSTRACT

PARADOX IN THE THOUGHT OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD
(Order No. _____)

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The problem of this dissertation is to expound and evaluate the nature and role of paradox in Kierkegaard's thought. The motivation of this attempt is twofold. First, it is to understand Kierkegaard, and to remove misunderstandings concerning his view. Secondly, it comes from an awareness of the importance and relevance of the issue for the present age.

The study is developed by investigating Kierkegaard's historical context, contemporary milieu, presuppositions, and method. This provides for us the basis for understanding Kierkegaard's concept of paradox. Next, the nature of his paradox is expounded, and is particularly related to reason and faith. Moreover, the role of paradox in his theology is discussed by examining his major doctrines. Finally, his paradox is critically evaluated.

Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is a result of his reaction against Hegelianism and Christendom. His task is a corrective to his time. The presuppositions of his thought are the Bible, revelation, the primacy of subjectivity, the priority of the individual, and the duality of thought and existence. His method is indirect communication.

According to Kierkegaard, paradox is a category referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities, such as the union of God and man in Christ. Paradox has the following characteristics. First, paradox is existential rather than logical, for it refers to existence rather than thought. Secondly, paradox is absolute rather than relative, for it cannot be resolved into a higher unity by reason. Thirdly, paradox is beyond the comprehension of abstract reason, for it confronts man as a fact, which cannot be reduced to logical categories. Finally, since paradox is experienced as a fact, it can be only accepted by faith.

The purpose of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is to protest against Hegelian rationalization of Christian faith. According to Kierkegaard, Hegelian logic deals not only with thought but also with existence, and thus the power of reason is exaggerated. The attempt of Kierkegaard is not to reject but to limit reason within the sphere of thought. In doing so, he tries to make room for subjective faith.

The strengths of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox include the following. He finds in paradox an illumination of religious understanding and a protest against the rationalization of Christian faith; and he recognizes the need of the God-man as Teacher and Saviour due to human sin, the limits of abstract reason, the multi-dimensionality of faith, and the distinction between thought and existence. His stress on subjectivity is a needed corrective to his and our times. Moreover, he makes

philosophy more concerned with life.

There are, however, weaknesses in Kierkegaard's view. His ways of expression are ambiguous at several points. He does not take objective element of Christianity seriously. His insistence on the absolute, qualitative difference between God and man is unbiblical, and he fails to see that the most fundamental difference lies in creatureliness rather than in sin. Further, he does not give reason a sufficient role in theology. Finally, he fails to recognize the importance of community in which the individual is a part.

PREFACE

In the writing of this dissertation I have been indebted to many persons. I owe to Professor Paul L. Holmer and Dean Robert Clyde Johnson of Yale Divinity School for introducing me to the thought of Søren Kierkegaard. I am particularly grateful for the valuable suggestions and able guidance I have received from Professor S. Paul Schilling, who has served as my first reader. I also extend my thanks to my second reader, Professor Erazim V. Kohak of the Department of Philosophy, for his helpful criticisms and for his promptness in reading my manuscript. Finally, I owe the debt of gratitude to my wife who has given me encouragement and has assisted me in numerous ways.

Boston, Massachusetts

← Tian-min Lin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	
1. The Problem of the Dissertation	1
2. Definitions	2
3. Limitations	3
4. Previous Research in the Field	4
5. The Method of the Dissertation	4
II. THE BACKGROUND OF KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PARADOX	
1. Historical Sources	6
1. Philosophical	6
(1) Socrates	6
(2) Hamann	9
(3) Hegel	10
(4) Schelling	13
ii. Theological	14
(1) Tertullian	14
(2) Athanasius	15
(3) Luther	16
2. Kierkegaard and His Time	18
1. Kierkegaard the Man	18
(1) Early Life	18
(2) Later Life	23
ii. The Objects of Kierkegaard's Reaction	25

(1) Hegelianism	25
a. Hegel's Philosophy of Religion .	26
b. Kierkegaard's Reaction	32
(2) Christendom	36
a. Religious Situation	37
b. Kierkegaard's Reaction	38
3. Kierkegaard's Task	41
III. KIERKEGAARD'S PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHOD	
1. Presuppositions	44
i. The Bible	44
ii. Revelation	47
iii. The Primacy of Subjectivity	49
iv. The Priority of the Individual	55
v. The Duality of Thought and Existence ..	57
2. Method	58
IV. THE NATURE OF KIERKEGAARD'S PARADOX	
1. The Characteristics of Paradox	63
2. Paradox and Reason	73
i. Various Interpretations	74
(1) Paradox against Reason	74
(2) Paradox above Reason	78
(3) Paradox both against and above Reason	81
ii. Toward a More Adequate Interpretation .	83
(1) No Contradiction between Paradox and Reason	84
(2) The Function of Reason	96

3. The Purpose of Paradox	103
4. Paradox and Faith	107
i. Reaction of Objective Reason	108
ii. Admission of Subjective Faith	110
V. PARADOX AND KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGY	
1. God	118
i. Transcendence	118
ii. Immanence	121
2. Christology	131
i. Incarnation	131
ii. Exaltation and Lowliness	137
3. Anthropology	141
i. Necessity and Freedom	141
ii. The Temporal and the Eternal	145
4. Sin	149
i. Original Sin	149
ii. Forgiveness of Sin	155
5. The Spheres of Human Existence	160
i. The Aesthetical Sphere	163
ii. The Ethical Sphere	165
iii. The Religious Sphere	173
(1) Religiousness A	174
(2) Religiousness B	176
6. Summary	181

VI. CRITICAL EVALUATION	
1. Contributions	184
2. Weaknesses	198
VII. CONCLUSIONS	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY	215
VITA	231

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to expound and evaluate the nature of paradox in Kierkegaard's thought. The motivation of this attempt is twofold. The first is to understand Kierkegaard, and to remove misunderstandings concerning his view. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the paradoxical nature of Christianity has often been misinterpreted and identified with irrationalism. This misunderstanding is unfortunate, for it prevents us from seeing the profound significance of paradox in Kierkegaard's thought. Hence there is a necessity to reexamine his concept of paradox.

The other motivation comes from an awareness of the importance and relevance of the issue for the present age. The problem of Christianity in the present age is little different from Danish Christianity in the nineteenth century. Objectivity is one of the prevailing attitudes of men in both ages; in Kierkegaard's day it takes mainly the form of Hegelianism; in our day, chiefly the form of scientific empiricism. The religious attitude of these two philosophies is purely objective and thus cannot accept the paradox of Christianity. For Hegelians, the paradox is irrational, hence they abolish it by affirming the implicit identity between

God and man. For scientific empiricists, the paradox is meaningless, for it is neither analytical nor objectively verifiable; hence they resolve it by rejecting or ignoring the reality of God. It is time that Kierkegaard's concept of paradox must be freshly and carefully examined. If genuine Christian faith is to be understood and soundly interpreted, and if there is to be dialogue between Christianity and other faiths and disciplines, this is one of the primary issues which must be faced.

The problem of this dissertation is thus to analyze the background, presuppositions, meaning, and function of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, and then to evaluate it in our modern context.

2. Definitions

The term "paradox" is originally a Greek word "paradoxon" which means contrary to opinion. Now the term has three main usages. (1) It refers to a statement which is contrary to received opinion or belief. In this sense it designates a proposition which is unbelievable or incredible. (2) It refers to a statement which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well-founded. (3) It refers to a statement which is actually self-contradictory, or contrary to reason or laws

of logic, and so essentially absurd and false.¹

The term "paradox" plays an important role in the theology of Kierkegaard and has influenced some contemporary Protestant theology. However, the term is used in a special sense by Kierkegaard. His usage is different from the three usages we mentioned. His concept of paradox has the following features. First, paradox is a category referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities. Secondly, paradox is absolute rather than relative. Thirdly, paradox is beyond the comprehension of reason in the sense of formal logic. Finally, paradox is the object of faith rather than the object of reason. We shall discuss this in more detail in chapter four.

3. Limitations

This dissertation does not try to deal with paradox in general or paradox in other theologians or philosophers. As the title specifies, this study is limited to Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, though other relevant aspects of his thought will be related. Since paradox plays a central role in Kierkegaard's theology, his major doctrines will be investigated.

¹The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), VII, 450.

4. Previous Research in the Field

Many works on Kierkegaard have been done. However, no comprehensive study of his concept of paradox has been undertaken. J. Heywood Thomas's book Subjectivity and Paradox¹ has a chapter on Kierkegaard's absolute paradox; it gives us some historical sources and his comments on some interpretations. A recent dissertation entitled "The Meaning of Paradox,"² by Leroy Kay Seat, deals with the use of the word "paradox" in contemporary theological and philosophical writings with special reference to Kierkegaard, as the subtitle indicates. However, it is limited to the "contextual analysis of the use of 'paradox'" in Kierkegaard's writings.³ Per Lønning⁴ and N. H. Sørensen⁵ have articles on Kierkegaard's concept of paradox; but neither treats it in detail. These works will be mentioned later.

¹J. Heywood Thomas, Subjectivity and Paradox (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

²Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967.

³Ibid., p. 25.

⁴Per Lønning, "Kierkegaard's Paradox," in Kierkegaard Symposium (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955), pp. 156-165.

⁵N. H. Sørensen, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox," in H. A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (eds.), A Kierkegaard Critique (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), pp. 207-227.

5. The Method of the Dissertation

This dissertation will be systematically developed into seven chapters. (1) Introduction. (2) The background of Kierkegaard will be investigated in order to show the historical influence as well as that of the context of his time in bringing out his concept of paradox. (3) The presuppositions and method of Kierkegaard will be discussed and thus will provide for us the basis for understanding his concept of paradox. (4) The nature of Kierkegaard's paradox will be expounded. In this connection the relation between his paradox and reason will be discussed. Since this is a controversial issue, various interpretations will be presented and commented on, and an interpretation will also be proposed which the author believes to be more adequate. Moreover, the purpose of Kierkegaard's paradox and the relation between his paradox and faith will be discussed. (5) The place of paradox in Kierkegaard's theology will be investigated. We shall do so by examining his major doctrines. (6) Kierkegaard's concept of paradox will be critically evaluated in relation to our present day. (7) Finally, the main conclusions will be presented.

CHAPTER II
THE BACKGROUND OF KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PARADOX

1. Historical Sources

In the following we shall deal with the major historical sources of Kierkegaard's thought, with special reference to paradox. It should be noted that Kierkegaard is an original and creative thinker who can never be exhausted merely in terms of his historical sources.

1. Philosophical

(1) Socrates (c. 470-399 B.C.)

There is no doubt that Kierkegaard is closer to Socrates than to other philosophers. "There is one thought," says Kierkegaard, "which has been in my soul and occupied it from my earliest years, inexplicably deeply rooted, a thought which has to do with Socrates as a model."¹ This is true, for Socrates is often mentioned in Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard has made a serious study of the early dialogues of Plato and the result of this is his Master's thesis on

¹The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, a selection edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), novel 129. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Journals.

irony, "with constant reference to Socrates," as the subtitle indicates.¹ Moreover, in Concluding Unscientific Postscript he refers quite frequently to Socrates; and in Philosophical Fragments he takes Socrates as the point of departure.

Kierkegaard has great respect for Socrates, but not for Plato. This respect is based on the fact that "Socrates was an ethical teacher"² and an existential thinker, whereas Plato is a speculative philosopher. Hence Kierkegaard says, "Socrates' infinite merit is to have been an existing thinker, not a speculative philosopher who forgets what it means to exist."³ Socrates is concerned with his existence as an individual, and is therefore the first existential thinker who teaches only what can be actually reduplicated in his personal life and avoids all external speculation. This has a specific influence on Kierkegaard. As John Wild points out, Kierkegaard's youthful study of Socrates has "determined his view of the negative function of philosophy, and thus exerted a critical influence on the whole course of his later reflection."⁴

¹The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates, trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

²Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 221. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Postscript.

³Ibid., p. 184.

⁴John Wild, "Kierkegaard and Classical Philosophy," Philosophical Review, XLIX (September, 1940), 537.

It is of equal importance that Socrates professes his ignorance of the truth, regarding himself as a philosopher not because he possesses truth but because he loves it. Kierkegaard writes, "This is where the profundity of socratic ignorance can be seen: to give up all inquisitive knowledge with passion in order to be simply ignorant before God."¹ In his humility Socrates recognizes the limits of man's ability to know. This has a significant influence on Kierkegaard, for, as we shall see, he insists that the function of the paradox is to limit reason within its proper place.

Moreover, Socrates is profoundly religious in spirit. As George F. Thomas points out,

Although he [Socrates] was a pagan, he understood his mission as a philosopher in religious terms, obeyed the voice of the 'daimon' within him, and died rather than escaped from Athens and abandon his philosophical vocation.²

The religious significance of Socrates is further acknowledged by Paul Tillich when he says, "By indirect communication Socrates brings to consciousness what is in man. Therefore, he is called a religious teacher. I am in full agreement with that."³ This may be the reason why Kierkegaard says, "There

¹Journals, no. 617.

²George F. Thomas, Religious Philosophies of the West (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 291.

³Paul Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, ed. Carl E. Broaten (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 172.

cannot really be the least doubt that what Christianity needs is another Socrates."¹

(2) Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788)

Hamann died before the end of the eighteenth century, but in Germany he was one of the most decisive influences of the nineteenth. He sets his face against the rationalism of the Enlightenment which represents for him the power of the devil rather than divine reason. He performs the useful function of drawing attention to and insisting on aspects of man's spiritual life which the rationalistic Enlightenment tends to ignore. As Frederick Copleston asserts, "We thus have the reaction of Hamann and Jacobi against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and, later, the reaction of Kierkegaard against the Hegelian form of rationalism."² This suggests that Hamann and Kierkegaard represent an important fact, the role of faith in human life.

There is a similarity between Hamann and Kierkegaard. As Walter Lowrie points out,

He [Hamann] was the better fitted to lead S. K. out of his doubt and despair in that he had gone through a like experience. And he was the more congenial to our hero because he was not only

¹Journals, no. 733.

²Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), Vol. 6, Part 1, p. 172.

serious but amusing. He was as witty and ironical as S. K.¹

The writings of Hamann are often quoted by Kierkegaard. For example, the motto of Fear and Trembling is a quotation from Hamann.² Hamann is one of the sources of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox. Kierkegaard quotes from him the following words which become his own favorite paradox:

Is it not an old idea you have often heard from me: incredibile sed verum? Lies and novels must be plausible, also hypotheses and fables; but not truths and fundamental propositions of faith.³

This shows us that Kierkegaard associates his assertion of the incomprehensibility of faith with Hamann.

(3) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Although Kierkegaard is well known for his attack upon Hegelianism, he cannot entirely escape from its mighty influence. His reaction to Hegel is a double or ambiguous one. One can learn from a footnote in the Postscript how highly Kierkegaard esteems Hegel, for he declares that Hegel has "willed something great," though without having

¹Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), I, 164.

²Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 21. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Fear.

³Papier, I A 237, quoted in Lowrie's Kierkegaard, I, 165.

achieved it.¹ There is a value in speculation, as Kierkegaard knows very well and is keen in admitting. To deny this value, he maintains, "would be in my opinion to prostitute oneself."² Richard J. Kroner points out, "As a matter of fact the Postscript is, like many other works of Kierkegaard, animated by and replete with the spirit of speculation."³ But at the same time we can see that Kierkegaard treats the system only with derision as if it were a ridiculous attempt. Concerning Kierkegaard's ambiguous relationship to Hegel, Kroner declares:

Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel was ambiguous from the beginning to the end. On the one hand his thought was so deeply formed by Hegel that he could never get rid of that influence. On the other hand his religious emotions protested against this over-powering influence, and he therefore reacted against the dialectic because he felt that he was overwhelmed by it. Kierkegaard thus fought in his writings not only Hegelian system, but also that spirit of Hegel which was alive in himself.⁴

It is not difficult to find out some of the Hegelian influences on Kierkegaard's thought. David F. Swenson states that Kierkegaard

¹Postscript, p. 99n.

²Ibid., p. 54.

³Richard J. Kroner, "Kierkegaard's Understanding of Hegel," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXI (January, 1966), 233-34.

⁴Ibid., p. 233.

translated the hardest passages into Danish, in order to make them clearer to himself, and he read and read the Logic over and over again. Both his philosophical style and his terminology show the influence of Hegel.¹

Thomas H. Croxall further points out that Kierkegaard's thesis The Concept of Irony is very Hegelian in form and tone, though anti-Hegelian in content.² In The Sickness unto Death Kierkegaard learns from Hegel the double character of the self as finite and infinite at the same time.³ Moreover, his doctrine of three spheres of existence is influenced by Hegelian dialectics. As Tillich asserts, "Between these spheres there is a leap. That is non-Hegelian. But the spheres themselves follow each other hierarchically, and that is truly Hegelian."⁴ Tillich further declares, "Kierkegaard was what he was because he had to struggle to overcome his master, Hegel. Hegel's thought permeates his whole work, almost every sentence."⁵

¹David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1945), p. 11.

²Thomas H. Croxall, "Preface," in Johannes Climacus or, de Omnibus Dubitandum est and A Sermon, trans. T. H. Croxall (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 7. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Johannes Climacus.

³The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 162. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Sickness.

⁴Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, p. 168.

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

(4) Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854)

Of all Hegel's contemporary opponents, Kierkegaard is most deeply influenced by Schelling and Trendelenburg. In Berlin he attended Schelling's lectures during the winter semester of 1841-42.¹ Schelling draws a distinction between negative and positive philosophy. The former moves in the realm of ideas; it is a deduction of concepts or essences. The latter is concerned with the that of things, with existence. For Schelling, both positive philosophy and negative philosophy are indispensable. Positive philosophy cannot simply dispense with negative philosophy. At the same time negative philosophy by itself by-passes actual existence.

Kierkegaard is in full agreement with Schelling's attack on Hegel in criticizing Hegel's logic, and his confusion of dialectics and history. Although Kierkegaard is not satisfied with Schelling's solution,² he takes over the categories of Schelling's existentialism (i.e. positive philosophy), such as existence, freedom, the personal decision of the individual, and so forth.³

¹Journals, no. 392.

²The Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 19n. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Dread.

³Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, pp. 162, 166.

ii. Theological

(1) Tertullian (c. 150-225)

In 1839 Kierkegaard began to read about Tertullian's theology.¹ For Tertullian, Christianity is a great divine foolishness, wiser than the highest philosophical wisdom of men, and in no way to be squared with any existing philosophical system. He asserts:

The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed because men must need be ashamed of it. The Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried and rose again; it is certain, because it is impossible.²

This is the so-called "Tertullian's paradox."

Kierkegaard's paradox cannot be identified with Tertullian's paradox, as will be discussed later. But Kierkegaard has a greater respect for Tertullian than for any other early Fathers because Tertullian's theology puts the priority on God rather than man. In his Journal, he writes:

Christianity--Tertullian

I have often said that Christianity can be represented in two ways: either in the interest of man (an extenuating adjustment), or in the interest of God (true Christian). I have also

¹Papier, II A 446, quoted in J. Heywood Thomas' Subjectivity and Paradox (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 105.

²Tertullian, De Carne Christi (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880), pp. 173-74.

said that if I do not succeed or dare to present Christianity in the latter form I shall admit it and keep the place free.

Hardly any of the early Fathers present Christianity in God's favour with the same emphasis as Tertullian.¹

(2) Athanasius (295-373)

In 1838 Kierkegaard wrote in his Journal, "These last few days I have been reading Görres' Athanasius not only with my eyes but with my whole body--with a throbbing heart."² After a few entries he spoke of "the noble alley of the Fathers in whose shade I can still sometimes find rest."³ This shows that he has a great appreciation of the Fathers including Athanasius. Like Athanasius, Kierkegaard presents Christian faith in the person of Jesus Christ as true God and true man in rejection of Ebionitism and Gnosticism.⁴ But unlike Athanasius, Kierkegaard takes an existential rather than an essential approach in his interpretation of the person of Christ.

It must be noted that for several centuries early Christian theology was devoted to the metaphysical problems raised by the paradox of the Incarnation. Like the Fathers, Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is concerned with the Incarnation. But, as we shall see, his interest is on

¹ Journals, no. 1192.

² Ibid., no. 199.

³ Ibid., no. 203.

⁴ Training, p. 122.

the union of two existential entities in Jesus Christ rather than on the union of two natures in him.

(3) Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Kierkegaard's relation to Luther is often critical. His criticism of Luther is not admiring in the earlier period, but in his last years we find a more serious denunciation. The following are some of his criticisms. "Luther really did incalculable harm by not becoming a martyr."¹ "He is an extremely important patient for Christianity, but he is not the doctor."² Furthermore, "Luther is the absolute opposite of an 'apostle,'" for he "expresses Christianity in the interest of man, is really the reaction of mankind against Christianity in God's interest."³ This attack on Luther is partially explained by ascetic views which Kierkegaard gradually adopted.⁴

However, Kierkegaard's religious belief is founded in Lutheran Christianity, with its stress on the sinfulness and inborn depravity of man, his distance from God, and the unutterable mercy of Christ in taking our sins upon

¹Journals, no. 1304.

²Ibid., no. 1325.

³Ibid., no. 1406.

⁴Cf. Johannes Sløk, "Kierkegaard and Luther," in A Kierkegaard Critique, eds. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 85.

himself.¹ According to N. H. Sørensen, Kierkegaard's paradox "is frequently an expression for what Luther often meant by the theologia crucis."² This can be seen in a footnote in the Postscript: "

A revelation is signalized by mystery, happiness by suffering, the certainty of faith by uncertainty, the ease of the paradoxical-religious life by its difficulty, the truth by absurdity.³

Furthermore, the central emphasis of Luther on justification by faith alone has an implication for Kierkegaard's view of subjective faith.⁴ As far as his ethical view is concerned, Kierkegaard presents a Lutheran denunciation of the moralism which has replaced God with a moral law.⁵

¹James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), p. 5.

²N. H. Sørensen, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox," in A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 217.

³Postscript, p. 387n.

⁴Cf. T. H. Croxall, "Assessment," in Johannes Climacus, p. 73.

⁵Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950), p. 116.

2. Kierkegaard and His Time

1. Kierkegaard the Man (1813-1855)

Kierkegaard's philosophy is intensely personal. As Frederick Copleston states, with him "there is a closer connection between his life and his philosophy than in the case of many other philosophers.... His philosophy is, as it were, a lived philosophy."¹ We may concern ourselves with Thomas Aquinas, for example, without knowing much of his personal situation, but this is not the case with Kierkegaard. In his Point of View for My Work as an Author Kierkegaard indicates that his life and work appear as a totality.² Therefore, if we want to understand his philosophy, we need to know something of his life.

(1) Early Life

Søren Aaby Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen on May 5, 1813. His father, Mikael Pedersen Kierkegaard (1756-1838) was the son of Jutland peasants. At the age of twelve he was called to Copenhagen to help in his uncle's haberdashery business. A few years later he took over the enterprise and

¹ Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. 7, Part 2, p. 107.

² The Point of View for My Work as an Author, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 76. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Point of View.

managed it with such success that in less than twenty years he was able to sell the business and retire as a wealthy man. Just prior to his retirement his wife had died, leaving no children. A year after her death he married his house-keeper, who gave birth to Mikael's first child five months after the wedding. Six children were to follow. The last of these was Søren Aaby when his father was fifty-six and his mother forty-five.

According to Søren, his father and his lover, Regine Olsen, were the two most influential persons in his life with respect to his becoming an author. In his Journal he writes:

If I were asked how I was educated to be an author, my relation to God apart, I should answer: by an old man whom I thank most of all, and by a young girl to whom I owe most of all --and to that which must have existed as a possibility in my nature; a mixture of age and youth, of the severity of winter and the mildness of summer--; the one educated with his noble wisdom, the other with her loving lack of understanding.¹

Søren's real education was under his father. His basic dispositions of dialectic, inwardness, and melancholy were influenced by his father. His father was not only a successful business man, but also a man of considerable mental gifts, which he cultivated by wide reading in philosophy

¹Journals, no. 912.

and theology. He gathered his friend Bishop J. P. Mynster and intellectual men to discussion meetings at his home. Among Søren's earliest recollections was that of listening to these discussions and seeing how his father was able to meet the arguments of those with whom he disputed.¹ His father was a severe, God-fearing man. The quality of his religious education was the orthodox traditions of Christianity. He states, "Humanly speaking my misfortune has clearly been that I was given a strict Christian upbringing."² Moreover, he was never given child companions and "never knew the joy of being a child."³ This tended to make him an introvert.⁴ But this misfortune of his relation to his father led him, later on, to experience "what it means to be a child in relation to God."⁵ As David F. Swenson points out:

The sternness of the parental discipline, indeed, gave the boy a lofty impression of duty, for he was trained to strict obedience.... This left a permanent mark upon his thought.⁶

¹ John A. Bain, Søren Kierkegaard: His Life and Religious Teaching (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1935), p. 24.

² Journals, no. 892.

³ Ibid., no. 860.

⁴ Cf. The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Gerda M. Andersen (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), p. 36. hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Diary.

⁵ Journals, no. 860.

⁶ David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, p. 73.

Søren experienced a great earthquake which had a great effect upon him. In 1838 he wrote:

Then it was that the great earthquake occurred, the terrible revolution which suddenly forced upon me a new and infallible law of interpretation of all the facts. Then I suspected that my father's great age was not a divine blessing but rather a curse There must be a guilt upon the whole family, the punishment of God must be on it.¹

The great earthquake led Søren to suspect that his father's great age was not a divine blessing but rather a curse, and that his melancholy was due to some secret sins. As a boy in Jutland, his father, "suffering many ills, famished and exhausted, stood up on a hill and cursed God!"² Moreover, his father married Søren's mother, the housekeeper, before the year of mourning of his first wife was over. The first child was born five months after the wedding. This made the old father never forgive himself for his defiance of God and his incontinence. Søren was convinced that the divine curse had been laid upon not only his father but also the entire family. This was confirmed by a rapid succession of deaths in the family.

Søren was thus alienated from his father and lived in a separate residence. His father made an effort at restoring their relationship. He even confessed to Søren his secret sins. In consequence, Søren was reconciled with his father

¹Journals, no. 243.

²Diary, p. 33.

and thus led back to an effective belief in God's fatherly love. In his Journal he wrote, "I learned from him the meaning of fatherly love, and that gave me an idea of the love of our heavenly Father, the only unshakable thing in life, the true Archimedean point."¹ The most powerful religious conversion of his lifetime occurred on May 19, 1838, a few months before his father's death. He wrote:

There is an indescribable joy which enkindles us as inexplicably as the apostle's outburst comes gratuitously: 'Rejoice I say unto you, and again I say unto you rejoice.'²

From childhood Søren was "under the sway of a prodigious melancholy."³ This is something inherited from his father. "I owe everything, from the beginning, to my father. When melancholy as he was, he saw me melancholy, his prayer to me was: Be sure that you really love Jesus Christ."⁴ Nevertheless, melancholy was not altogether useless, for "melancholy, soul-sick, profoundly and absolutely a failure in many ways, one thing was given to me: a pre-eminent intelligence, presumably so that I should not be quite defenceless."⁵ Moreover, underneath melancholy "lies the richest

¹Ibid.

³Point of View, p. 76.

⁵Ibid., no. 1335.

²Journals, no. 207.

⁴Journals, no. 773.

and most beautiful material for work and of the very kind I need at that movement."¹

(2) Later Life

Regine was the other person who produced an overwhelming effect upon Kierkegaard's life and thought. She was born on January 23, 1823, and so was about ten years younger than he. They met accidentally in May, 1837, and in him the meeting produced a strong affection. On February 2 of the next year he wrote in his Journal: "Thou sovereign of my heart ('Regina') treasured in the deepest fastness of my breast, in fullness of my thought."² In his Journal again and again he pours out expressions of his love. His youth had been unhappy, and now supreme joy had seemed to have come into his life. He dreamed that in her he had found the cure for his inherited melancholy. The engagement did not take place until three years after their first meeting. However, Kierkegaard never forgot the sin which he had committed in his youth, for on one occasion his friends made him drunk and took him to a brothel. This is one of the basic reasons which deterred him from marrying Regine. For him, the requirements of marriage are "open-heartedness, candor,

¹Ibid., no. 807.

²Ibid., no. 259.

publicity on the largest conceivable scale; for this is the life-principle of love, and here in the intimate life secretiveness is its death."¹ Since Kierkegaard did not want his secret sin to be revealed before his lover, Regine, the engagement could never lead to marriage. He even considered it his duty to be a lifelong penitent to atone for the sin of his youth. Thus, the engagement was finally broken.

The incident had deep results on Kierkegaard. "It is essentially owing to her, to my melancholy and to my money that I became an author."² Some of his works were evidently written in part at least as an apology for his conduct towards her, and to explain his views on marriage as justifying his behavior in relation to her.³ However, for Kierkegaard this unhappy incident was not purely a loss, for "this factum was for me at the same time a religious awakening."⁴ He came to regard his peculiar psycho-physical constitution as a vehicle used by God to confirm his exceptional status among men. As James Collins suggests:

¹Either/Or, II, 65.

²Journals, no. 748.

³John A. Bain, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 35.

⁴Point of View, p. 83.

God's purpose in giving him a thorn was not to make a useless idiosyncrasy, a quaint conceit, out of his life. Rather, Kierkegaard believed that he was asked to forgo the security and consolation of the ordinary ways of life, in order to further the positive ends of providence. He had received sealed orders, and those orders read: Go further!¹

ii. The Objects of Kierkegaard's Reaction

Kierkegaard must be viewed not only in terms of his life but also in the context of his time. Even he himself says that his task is "a corrective" to his time.² We cannot have a proper understanding of his concept of paradox unless we know what he is attacking. The major objects of his attack are Hegelianism and Christendom.

(1) Hegelianism

In the day of Kierkegaard Hegelianism was the ruling philosophy. It was Johan Ludwig Heiberg (1791-1860) who first introduced Hegel's philosophy into Denmark. In his lectures Heiberg says that Hegel "reconciles Ideality with Actuality, as does Goethe's poetry."³ He upholds the tenet of Hegel that religion and philosophy have the same goal. Before we

¹James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, p. 11.

²Journals, no. 1141.

³J. L. Heiberg, Prose Works, I (Copenhagen, 1861), p. 417, quoted in T. H. Croxall, "Assessment," in Johannes Climacus, p. 46.

discuss Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel, let us summarize Hegel's philosophy of religion.

a. Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

Hegel maintains that thought and being are one, or in his words, there is a "unity of essence and existence."¹ This point is of great importance for understanding Hegel. The subject-matter of his philosophy is the Absolute. But the Absolute is the Totality, reality as a whole, the universe. "Philosophy is concerned with the true and the true is the whole."² Further, this totality or whole is infinite life, a process of self-development. If we look on the whole process as self-unfolding of an essence, the actualization of an eternal Idea, we can see that it is the telos or end of the process which reveals what the Absolute reality is. The whole process is the Absolute; but in a teleological process it is the telos or end which shows its nature and meaning. Philosophy must take the form of a systematic understanding of this teleological process.³

Hegel agrees with Aristotle that God is self-thinking

¹Hegel, Science of Logic, trans. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers (New York: Macmillan, 1929), II, 160.

²Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 81.

³Cf. ibid., p. 70.

Thought, and that this self-thinking Thought is the telos or end which draws the world as its final cause. But whereas the self-thinking Thought of Aristotle is an already constituted self-consciousness which does not depend on the world, the self-thinking Thought of Hegel is not a transcendent reality but rather the universe's knowledge of itself. The whole process of reality is a teleological movement towards the actualization of self-thinking Thought. To say, therefore, that the Absolute is self-thinking Thought is to affirm the identity of the ideal and the real, of thought and being, of subjectivity and objectivity. But this is an identity-in-difference, not a blank undifferentiated identity. For the Absolute knows itself as the Totality, as the whole process of its becoming; but at the same time it sees the distinction between the phases of its own life. It knows itself as an identity-in-difference, as the unity which comprises distinguishable phases within itself.

According to Hegel, the rational is the real and the real the rational, in the sense that reality is the necessary process by which infinite Reason, the self-thinking Thought, actualizes itself and returns to itself. Nature and the sphere of the human spirit are then the field in which the eternal Idea or the eternal essence manifests itself. In Nature the Logos goes over, as it were, into objectivity, into the material world, which is its antithesis. In Spirit

the Logos returns to itself, in the sense that it manifests itself as what it essentially is. The life of the Absolute thus comprises three main phases: the logical Idea, Nature, and Spirit. The system of philosophy will fall into three main parts: logic, which studies the Absolute "in itself," the philosophy of Nature, which studies the Absolute "for itself," and the philosophy of Spirit, which studies the Absolute "in and for itself." These three parts together form the philosophical construction of the life of the Absolute.

In the philosophy of Spirit there are three spheres: the spheres of subjective, objective and absolute Spirit. Subjective Spirit deals with human Spirit, whereas objective Spirit is Spirit in society and social orders. Absolute Spirit is the life of the Absolute's developing self-knowledge. It is the process whereby the Absolute actualizes itself precisely as self-thinking Thought. It does so at three main levels, those of art, religion, and philosophy. What Hegel means by this can easily be understood if we approach the matter from the point of view of man's knowledge of the Absolute. First, the Absolute can be apprehended under the sensuous form of beauty as manifested in Nature or in the work of art. Secondly, the Absolute can be apprehended in the form of pictorial, figurative, or representative thought which finds expression in the language of religion. Thirdly,

the Absolute can be apprehended purely conceptually, that is, in speculative philosophy. Thus though the content is the same, the form is different in these three levels. That is to say, the Absolute is apprehended in different ways in these activities.

In religion there are three stages: first, the notion of religion; secondly, the definite religions; and finally, the absolute religion.

According to Hegel, religion is the relation of the human spirit to the Absolute Spirit, and the concrete reality of religion is a synthesis of two aspects, the theoretical and the practical. Theoretically, mediation between God and man is accomplished in the so-called proofs of the existence of God. This involves an ideal relation between God and man, finite consciousness of God. Practically, reconciliation between God and man is effected in worship. This involves self-consciousness of man in God and God in man.¹

Religion as notion alone is not true religion. It is the very nature of the notion to realize or objectify itself. Thus the second stage of religion is definite religion. There are two main phases of definite religion, namely, the religion of nature and the religion of spiritual individuality. In the religion of nature, God is conceived as less

¹ Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. E. B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson (London: K. Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1895), I, 59-258; III, 155-367.

than Spirit. It is subdivided into three phases: first, immediate religion or magic; secondly, the religion of substance, such as Chinese religion, Hinduism, and Buddhism; thirdly, the religions of Persia, Syria, and Egypt. In the religion of spiritual individuality, God is conceived as Spirit, but in the form of an individual person or of individual persons. The triad comprises the Jewish, Greek, and Roman religions.¹

The objectification of the notion in the definite religions is necessary but not enough. A third stage of religion is therefore necessary, namely, the absolute religion or Christianity. Only in the absolute religion does Spirit's appearance correspond to its notion and so fulfill the Idea of religion. Here Spirit

knows itself no longer as Spirit in any definite form or limitation, but has now overcome those limitations, this finiteness, and is actually, what it is potentially.²

In Christianity God is conceived as the Trinity of Persons. God the Father exists in the form of universality. God the Son is the universal which particularizes itself and returns to concrete individuality. God the Holy Spirit is God who in love returns to identity with Himself.

This shows that the infinite and finite are not over

¹Ibid., I, 270-II, 323.

²Ibid., I, 83.

against one another, but "the indissoluble unity of the two."¹ "What is true is the unity of the infinite, in which the finite is contained."² Thus, although the finite appears as other than the infinite, God, it is in reality a necessary manifestation of His life and is contained in Him as a movement. In this manner Hegel denies all dualism between God and the world. He finds no difficulty with Christ as the God-man. It is the nature of the Absolute to incarnate itself in finite beings, for there is

an act of going out on the part of God into finitude, a manifesting of God in finitude, for finitude, taken in its proper meaning, implies simply the separation of that which is implicitly identical but which maintains itself in the act of separation.³

Thus the Incarnation "involves the truth that the divine and human natures are not implicitly different."⁴

Concerning the nature of religious faith, says Hegel, "rational knowledge, therefore, is an essential element in the Christian religion itself."⁵ Religious faith is a form of knowledge, a pictorial representation of the ultimate reality. In religion "we know that God is, but not what He is."⁶ If we are to understand what religious faith is, we must get beyond it to philosophy. "By philosophical

¹Ibid., I, 197.

³Ibid., III, 38.

⁵Ibid., I, 17.

²Ibid., I, 200.

⁴Ibid., III, 77.

⁶Ibid., I, 44.

knowledge or cognition, we mean not only that we know that an object is, but also what it is."¹ Thus Christianity strives to understand its own faith, but speculative philosophy is a continuation of this attempt. The difference lies in the fact that philosophy substitutes the form of pure thought for the form of pictorial or figurative thought. Although philosophy and religion are different in form, they deal with the same content. "The object of religion as well as of philosophy is eternal truth in its objectivity, God and nothing but God, and the explication of God."²

b. Kierkegaard's Reaction

Kierkegaard is well known in his denunciation of Hegelianism. In Langmead Casserley's opinion, Kierkegaard is the greatest of Hegel's critics.³ His major criticisms of Hegelianism are as follows.

First, according to Kierkegaard, Hegel confuses thought with being, or essence with existence. In other words, Hegel confuses the dialectical process of logic with the actual movement in history. Kierkegaard's charge against Hegel is stated in two theses: "(A), a logical system is possible; (B), an existential system is impossible."⁴ Here Kierkegaard's

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., I, 19.

³ J. V. Langmead Casserley, The Christian in Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 150.

⁴ Postscript, p. 99.

standpoint is not anti-logical or irrational but rather one which would insist upon the difference between thought and being. A logical system is possible but only at the cost of excluding existence, for logic "is indifferent to existence in the sense of actuality."¹ Hegel is wrong in introducing movement into logic, for logic cannot explain movement. Rather, movement is the presupposition of thinking, and it cannot be explained. Moreover, Kierkegaard insists that there is no "absolute beginning" in a logical system.² The whole logical system, although it deals only with concepts, rests upon an act of the will on the part of an existent thinker, and this cannot be included in the system. In fact Hegel does "forget that he is an existing individual."³ In his second thesis Kierkegaard resists the possibility of an existential system. A system requires finality, while "existence is precisely the opposite of finality."⁴ The existential individual is concrete and is always in the state of becoming. But a logical system cannot deal with the concrete and becoming, since its function can only deal with the universal, the necessary, and unchanging. In sum, Kierkegaard holds that Hegel's logical system can be used in the sphere of thought, but not in that of existence.

¹Postscript, p. 101.

²Ibid., p. 102.

³Ibid., p. 107.

⁴Ibid.

Second, Hegel overlooks the uniqueness of the concrete individual. It is the contention of Kierkegaard "that the Hegelian philosophy, by failing to define its relation to the existing individual, and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."¹ In Kierkegaard's opinion, Hegel has no place for the existing individual. Hegel subordinates at every point the individual to the universal. As George Thomas puts it:

In his theory of knowledge, the individual is only a particular expression of the universal, the concept. In his metaphysics, he reduces the individual spirit to a manifestation of the universal Spirit or Absolute. In his ethics, he treats the self simply as a member of the state whose duties are to be determined not by his own conscience but by his station in society. And in his philosophy of history, all individuals, even great men who have played creative roles, are regarded as mere instruments used by the "cunning" of the World Reason for its universal purposes.²

Kierkegaard emphasizes the category of the individual, for it is the most essential clue to the interpretation of ethics. If the individual is merely a manifestation of the universal Spirit, and if his freedom lies only in accepting the destiny imposed upon him, there is no room for moral effort. Further, moral decision involving a real choice between alternatives is ruled out. In consequence, man

¹Postscript, p. 275.

²Thomas, Religious Philosophies of the West, pp. 291-92.

rejects his personal responsibility and authentic existence. Kierkegaard thus charges that "fundamentally Hegel makes men into heathens, into a race of animals gifted with reason. For in the animal world 'the individual' is always less important than the race."¹

Finally, in subordinating religion to philosophy, Hegel has abolished the paradox of Christianity. At the center of Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegelianism is his emphasis upon the paradoxical nature of Christianity. One of Kierkegaard's basic statements is: "The idea of philosophy is mediation-- Christianity's is the paradox."² In the Hegelian system "the qualitative distinction between God and man is pantheistically abolished."³ The Hegelian system is a monistic one which stresses the identity between thought and being, subject and object, ideal and real, and even divine and human. Continuity and unity are the characteristics of Hegelian system, for all differences are reconciled in the whole. In contrast, Kierkegaard insists that "Christianity is no doctrine concerning the unity of the divine and the human, or concerning the identity of subject and object."⁴ The aim of Hegel's speculative philosophy is a synthesis. In contrast, Kierkegaard maintains that Christianity has no

¹Journals, no. 356.

²Sickness, p. 248.

³Postscript, p. 290

⁴Ibid., p. 338.

interest in the mediation of opposites.

If Christianity is the opposite of speculation it is also the opposite of mediation, the latter being a category of speculative thought; what then can it mean to mediate them? But what is the opposite of mediation? It is the absolute paradox.¹

The distinctive feature of Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, is that it asserts the infinite difference between God and man and regards Jesus Christ as both God and man. It is against Hegel that Kierkegaard emphasizes the paradox of Christianity. As James Collins puts it:

Kierkegaard's stress upon the paradoxical quality of Christian faith is an emergency measure, dictated not by enmity toward our finite understanding but by a resolve not to permit religious faith to be transformed once again into a preliminary stage in the growth of Hegelian reason.²

(2) Christendom

In the 19th century the domination of Hegelianism was not only in philosophy but also in theology. Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed out that Hegelianism "had infected the Danish Church and Danish theology."³ Let us first describe the religious situation of Denmark in Kierkegaard's time

¹ Postscript, p. 338.

² James Collins, God in the Modern Philosophy (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1959), pp. 347-48.

³ Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard, p. 114.

and then discuss how he reacted to it.

a. Religious Situation

The general religious situation in Kierkegaard's time can be described as follows:

It was a State Church, in which the congregation were largely passive, and the clergy were officials paid by the State, while the authority and influence of bishops counted for almost everything.¹

Martensen and Mynster were the two most eminent religious leaders of the Church, and they well represented the spirit of Christendom: "Martensen represented the dogmatic system, as a thing for itself; and Mynster represented quietistic piety--as a thing for itself!"²

Jacob Peter Mynster (1775-1854) grew up in a pietistic but cultured family. At the university he came under the influence of the prevailing rationalism, which made him reluctant to enter the ministry, and he spent some years as a tutor. In 1802 he was ordained as a country pastor, but at the same time he became more and more dissatisfied with his religious position. In 1803, as he read Jacobi, a sudden spiritual transformation took place in him, God became a living reality to him as never before. In 1812

¹Denzil G. M. Patrick, Pascal and Kierkegaard: A Study in the Strategy of Evangelism (London: Lutterworth, 1947), II, 39.

²Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, II, 519.

he was called to Copenhagen as pastor and also teacher at a seminary. There his message brought to people a new understanding of the Christian faith and life. Among his most regular hearers were Søren Kierkegaard and his father. From 1834 till his death he was Bishop of Zealand. He became a staunch defender of orthodoxy and was strictly attached to the Established Church. Thus, Kierkegaard criticized Mynster for presenting only one side of Christianity and omitting "something decisively Christian," namely the imitation of Christ and "dying from the world, by voluntary renunciation."¹

Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-84) was a theologian of European reputation and Mynster's successor as Bishop of Zealand. He was attracted to Hegel because Hegel opposed Schleiermacher and romantic theologians who sought for ultimate truth in the feelings rather than in the intellect. He even claimed that he had gone beyond Hegel in the interpretation of Christianity. His works on Ethics and on Dogmatics were acclaimed even in England and America.²

b. Kierkegaard's Reaction

¹ Attack upon "Christendom," 1854-1855, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 5. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Attack. Also see Lowrie's Kierkegaard, II, 509-522.

² Lowrie, Kierkegaard, II, 505-509; Croxall, "Assessment," in Johannes Climacus, pp. 47-50.

In his observation of Danish Christianity, Kierkegaard sadly says, "The religious situation in our country is... Christianity does not exist;"¹ "Christendom is apostasy from Christianity."² His major criticisms of Christendom are as follows.

First, there is a lack of religious passion in Christendom. Kierkegaard holds that "all religion has to do with passion, with having passion," whereas the general attitude of Christians in Christendom is "lukewarmness and indifferentism."³ In the very beginning sentence of The Present Age, he states, "Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion."⁴ To Kierkegaard the malady of the age is the lack of passion. This is not the case in early Christianity where a believer "strove enthusiastically to understand himself in the existence of faith."⁵ Due to the objective tendency of the age and the vast increase of knowledge men have forgotten what it is to exist and what

¹Attack, p. 29.

²The Last Years: Journals 1853-1855, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 175, 238.

³Attack, p. 185.

⁴The Present Age, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 33.

⁵Postscript, p. 273.

inwardness signifies. "If anyone desires to be a Christian with infinite passion he is judged to be a fool."¹

Secondly, Christianity has become a formality in Christendom. The illusion is that when one is born within Christendom, he becomes a Christian.² The established Church seems to provide the believer the necessary compromises to allow them to live as pagans. The job of the clergy is "to get people to assume the name of Christian, and at the same time to make it stop there."³ Even the clergy forget that they should bear witness to the truth they teach. "People simply do not live religiously,"⁴ for they do not take religion seriously, and "what the New Testament understands by being a Christian is the last thing of all to be pleasing to a man."⁵

Finally, Christendom dispenses with the paradox from Christian teaching. It "takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces, probability, the plainly comprehensible."⁶ Christianity thus becomes an intellectual matter. The fundamental misfortune of Christendom, in Kierkegaard's opinion, is that the doctrine of the God-man "is taken in vain," and "the

¹Postscript, p. 193.

²The Last Years, p. 86.

³Attack, p. 85.

⁴Journals, no. 864.

⁵Attack, p. 151.

⁶Ibid., p. 162.

qualitative distinction between God and man is pantheistically abolished."¹ It is thus clear that Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom is an attempt to preserve the Christian paradox. As Paul Tillich says, "He [Kierkegaard] attacks theology because it is an objectifying attempt to construct a well-formulated system out of the existential paradox."²

3. Kierkegaard's Task

Kierkegaard's task can be best characterized as, in his word, "the corrective." He states, "My task has been to bring a corrective where the establishment is concerned, not to bring anything new which might subvert or supersede it."³ This is indeed "a Socratic task."⁴ A corrective is needed in order to regain the balance in a time when one idea has been carried too far. As Libuse L. Miller puts it:

The corrective, properly understood and applied, is the restoration and enrichment of the understanding of a reality that has always been present to human consciousness in various times, in various places, in various degrees, but that now needs to be re-emphasized and reinterpreted under a markedly new set of circumstances.⁵

¹Sickness, p. 248.

²Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, p. 177.

³Journals, no. 1141.

⁴Attack, p. 283.

⁵Libuse Lukas Miller, In Search of the Self: The Individual in the Thought of Kierkegaard (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), p. 294.

In this way the corrective must not be mistaken for the whole or the norm. "A corrective made into the norm, the whole, is eo ipso confusing in the next generation (when that which it was meant to correct no longer exists)."¹ If the corrective is not the norm, Kierkegaard's task cannot be properly criticized as one-sidedness. He asserts:

What I present is Christianity. Neither shall anyone be able to accuse me of one-sidedness, of not being able to see the reverse; for in me the reverse has its warmest defenders.²

Kierkegaard is the prophetic voice which seeks to bring to his age not what it demands, but rather what it needs. As a corrective, he is doomed to be rejected by men because he stands for what the age does not want to understand. He saw himself from his early years that he would be a sacrifice for the age. "It is clear enough that I shall be sacrificed."³ He continues:

In every generation there are two or three who are sacrificed for the others, are led by frightful sufferings to discover what redounds to the good of others. So it was that in my melancholy I understand myself as singled out for such a fate.⁴

Kierkegaard is well aware that he is chosen by God for the need of his age.

¹ Journals, no. 1298.

² ibid., no. 970.

³ Journals, no. 626.

⁴ Point of View, p. 79; see also Journals, no. 1294.

As a skillful cook says of a dish in which there are already a great many ingredients: 'It still needs just a little pinch of cinnamon!.... So it is with providence.... A little pinch of spice! That is to say: Here a man must be sacrificed, he is needed to impart a particular taste to the rest.'¹

From what has been said, it is clear that Kierkegaard is not a systematic theologian or philosopher, but rather a religious author. He accepts the orthodox teaching of the Lutheran Church of his day as an essentially adequate statement of the content of Christian doctrine. He does not think of himself as a theologian charged with the task of reconstructing Christian doctrine. "The task he felt called upon to perform was not to reform the dogmatic tradition of his Church but to insist upon its being practised."² Thus his problem is "how" rather than "what."³

¹Journals, no. 1260.

²Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, II., 375-76.

³Point of View, p. 13; Postscript, p. 181.

CHAPTER III
KIERKEGAARD'S PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHOD

1. Presuppositions

It is evident that one cannot think without presuppositions, and at the same time one's presuppositions will often determine his thought. In order to understand Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, it is necessary to investigate his presuppositions.

1. The Bible

Kierkegaard's thought has a very deep biblical foundation. The highest authority for him is quite simply the teaching of the Bible. Yet, "it is amazing how many scholars, intent upon reconstructing his mental history, have ignored the Biblical sources of his ideas;" and there have been "so few studies of the Biblical sources and structure of his thinking."¹

Kierkegaard is a man of prayer and lives a devotional life. "The bible is always on my table and is the book I read most."² Apart from attendance at public worship in his early

¹Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto (eds.), Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953), pp. 6-7. This seems to be the case today as it was in 1953 when this book was written.

²Stages on Life's Way, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 218. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Stages.

life, he "devoted a definite time every day, regularly and with monastic precision, to reading for his own sake edifying books."¹ The impression of this reading is reflected everywhere in his Journal and works.

Kierkegaard believes the authority of the Bible, especially the New Testament. "The New Testament contains the divine truth."² "The New Testament is indeed a strange book. It is always right, even if the opposite appears to be the case."³ One of Kierkegaard's criticisms of Luther is that Luther's starting point is not from but "above the Bible."⁴ Luther "drags St. Paul one-sidedly to the fore and uses the Gospels less;" moreover, "he rejects the epistle of St. James."⁵ Kierkegaard insists that the New Testament is the criterion for "being a Christian."⁶ As a matter of fact, his attack upon Christendom is wholly based on the requirements of the New Testament. According to him, the wickedness of Christendom is precisely that "the Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist."⁷ Moreover, it is only on the ground of the Bible that Kierkegaard is prepared to

¹Point of View, p. 19; see also p. 83.

²The Last Years, p. 57.

³Ibid.

⁴Journals, no. 1008.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The Last Years, pp. 81-82.

⁷Attack, p. 32.

discuss religious problems with people.¹

The Bible has a profound influence on Kierkegaard's life and thought.

It is safe to assert that the Scriptures exerted a more continuous, a more creative, a more profound constraint upon his nimble thoughts, than did any other book or any comparable group of books.²

He gains spiritual strength and religious passion from his reading of the Bible. In fact, he is a gifted interpreter of the Bible.³ His concept of paradox can be in part traced to Paul's teaching concerning the cross: "to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Gentiles foolishness."⁴ This particular Pauline passage is reflected in Kierkegaard's teaching on the paradox:

Christianity has declared itself to be the eternal essential truth which has come into being in time. It has proclaimed itself as the Paradox, and it has required of the individual the inwardness of faith in relation to that which stamps itself as an offense to the Jews and a folly to the Greeks--and an absurdity to the understanding.⁵

This same Pauline passage is also reflected in many other places among Kierkegaard's writings.⁶

¹Journals, no. 1287.

²Paul S. Minear, Kierkegaard and the Bible, p. 6.

³This is shown in Kierkegaard's works, particularly in Fear and Trembling, The Concept of Dread, and Works of Love.

⁴I Cor. 1: 23.

⁵Postscript, p. 191.

⁶See Minear, Kierkegaard and the Bible, p. 29, under I Cor. 1:23.

ii. Revelation

Although Kierkegaard admires Socrates as the first existential thinker in the history of philosophy, he does not agree with the Socratic presupposition of truth. Socrates maintains that the truth is within man, whereas for Kierkegaard the truth is given from outside, namely, revelation.

According to the Socratic doctrine of Recollection, learning is interpreted as a kind of remembering. One who is ignorant of a truth needs only a reminder to become conscious of what he already knows. "Thus the Truth is not introduced into the individual from without, but was within him."¹ Socrates plays the role of midwife, "for between man and man the maieutic relationship is the highest."² The teacher's relation to the learner with respect to the truth can only be that of an occasion or stimulus, since the truth is within man. The teacher, in this way, does not introduce anything new to the learner, but merely helps him to recall what he knew in the realm of the Ideas before birth but forgot when the soul was imprisoned in the body. Thus the teacher is an occasion, but not a condition, for knowing the truth.

¹Philosophical Fragments, trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 11. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Fragments.

²Ibid., p. 13.

Kierkegaard offers an alternative view which, in his opinion, "indisputably makes an advance upon Socrates."¹ For Kierkegaard, man is in "a state of Error;" hence he is not in possession of but is destitute of the truth.² This state of error is due to sin.³ It is sin that has corrupted man's faculties; so that he cannot know the truth. In this way, "if the learner is to acquire the Truth, the Teacher must bring it to him; and not only so, but he must also give him the condition necessary for understanding it."⁴

The teacher who frees man from the state of error and provides for him the condition for understanding the truth must be more than an ordinary man. Such a teacher must be Savior and Redeemer, "for he saves the learner from his bondage" and "redeems the learner from the captivity into which he had plunged himself."⁵ The effect upon the learner is that he becomes a man of a different quality, "a new creature."⁶

In short, Socrates presupposes that the truth is within man and can be recalled by his own efforts with the help of a human teacher who merely serves as an occasion for his learning. In contrast, Kierkegaard insists that man is

¹Fragments, p. 139.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶Ibid., p. 23.

in error and cannot know the truth by his own powers; hence the truth and the condition for understanding it must be provided by God. It is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the God-man that, according to Kierkegaard, is the absolute paradox.

iii. The Primacy of Subjectivity

Kierkegaard states, "Truth is subjectivity."¹ This means that religious or eternal truth is subjective.² We can better understand the primacy of subjectivity in Kierkegaard's thought if we first discuss his view of objectivity.

By objectivity Kierkegaard means historical and philosophical methods.³ He insists that the truth of Christianity cannot be proved by the historical method. The inadequacy of the historical method is due to the fact that "anything historical is merely an approximation."⁴ In other words, Kierkegaard believes that historical truth is only probable but not necessary. This view has a background in Greek philosophy. The ancient Greek philosophers argue that there can be no knowledge of that which is in the state of flux. If there is to be knowledge, the object of knowledge must

¹Postscript, p. 169.

²In Point of View Kierkegaard says, "By 'truth' I mean always 'eternal truth.'" (p. 115).

³Postscript, p. 23.

⁴Ibid., p. 26.

be invariable, constant, and necessary. Plato distinguishes knowledge as cognition of that which is eternal and necessary, from opinion which is contingent and changeable. According to Kierkegaard, the task of the historian is an endless one. "One generation after another departs from the scene, new difficulties arise and are overcome, and new difficulties again arise."¹ In consequence, the infinite personal passionate interest of the subject vanishes because the decision is postponed. Moreover, the results of biblical criticism have little relevance with respect to faith. "Faith does not result simply from a scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith."²

The philosophical method is also objective. The speculative philosopher views Christianity as an historical, objective phenomenon.³ But, as has been shown, Kierkegaard maintains that Christianity is not of this kind. His main criticism is that "philosophy in its objectivity is wholly indifferent to his and my and your eternal happiness."⁴ For him, the task of the philosopher

consists in getting more and more away from himself so as to become objective, thus vanishing

¹Ibid., p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴Ibid., p. 53.

from himself and becoming what might be called the contemplative energy of philosophy itself.¹

Kierkegaard thus has shown that objectivity cannot prove the truth of Christianity. He goes on to insist that subjectivity is able to appropriate the truth of Christianity. For him, truth is subjectivity. As he states in the closing sentence of Either/Or: "Only the truth that edifies is the truth for thee."² In the Postscript he explicitly declares:

Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.³

In his Journal he further insists on the primacy of subjective truth: "The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."⁴

According to Kierkegaard, the proper religious attitude is that of the subjective thinker. The subjective thinker is the engaged or involved thinker whose thought, directed to his personal eternal happiness, moves in passion and earnestness. He finds in the theoretical detachment of objective reflection a comic neglect of the existing individual who does the reflecting. For Kierkegaard, objective reflection tends to make the subject accidental

¹ Ibid., p. 54.

² Either/Or, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), II, 356.

³ Postscript, p. 33.

⁴ Journals, no. 22.

and transforms his existence into something indifferent and abstract. "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said."¹ Objective truth designates a "what" or an objective content that can be observed in theoretical detachment, whereas subjective truth is a "how" that must be inwardly appropriated. Truth, subjectively appropriated, is a truth which I live, not merely observe. It is a truth which I am, not merely possess. Truth is a mode of action or a manner of existence. The subjective thinker thus lives the truth.

This leads Kierkegaard to give an extreme example of the superiority of subjective over objective thinking.

If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.²

This passage has been easily misunderstood by many of his readers. For example, Edward John Carnell criticizes:

Kierkegaard said that a passionate idolater deserves more praise than a person who prays to the true God in a false spirit. Presumably the false spirit is that of complacency. Certainly complacency is a serious problem within the

¹ Postscript, p. 181.

² Ibid., pp. 180-1.

church, but it is difficult to see how the problem is in any way solved by canonizing passionate idolaters.¹

The misunderstanding lies in the failure to recognize that Kierkegaard is discussing the question here in the context of religious attitude rather than religious object. Kierkegaard indeed praises the passionate idolater, but not the passionate idolater.²

It has often been misunderstood that Kierkegaard avoids objectivity and that his philosophy is characterized by an extreme subjective bias. His concept of subjectivity in a way is different from the traditional. But we must not confuse his concept of subjectivity with subjectivism. It has nothing in common with the romantic concept of religious feeling. Subjectivity is used by Kierkegaard in a unique way in which even the objective element is included. In his Journal he writes:

There is a 'how' which has this quality, that if it is truly given, then the 'what' is also given; and that it is the 'how' of 'faith.' Here, quite certainly, we have inwardness as its maximum proving to be objectivity once again. And this is an aspect of the principle of subjectivity which, so far as I know, has never before been presented or worked out.³

¹Edward John Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 169.

²However, one may question whether Kierkegaard recognizes that one can pray with passion to the true God.

³Journals, no. 1021.

Kierkegaard is thus by no means an opponent of objectivity as such. He insists simply that objectivity must be placed back into subjectivity. The subjective thinker emphatically rejects the objectification of faith, but he in no way denies the validity of objectivity so long as it is existentially rooted. As Walter Lowrie states:

He [Kierkegaard] insisted upon 'subjectivity,' and by that he meant, not a disposition to ignore facts, but a vital concern about them --especially about the facts which most properly concern man.¹

As a matter of fact, Kierkegaard begins not with his own subjectivity, but with the revelation of truth by the divine teacher as a given fact, and his subjective appropriation of this is a response to it as an objective reality. In an article entitled "My Position as a Religious Writer in 'Christendom' and My Tactics," Kierkegaard writes:

I have never fought in such a way as to say: I am the true Christian, others are not Christians. No, my contention has been this: I know what Christianity is, my imperfection as a Christian I myself fully recognize, but I know what Christianity is.²

This passage is a clear indication that the problem of the "how" in Kierkegaard has already presupposed the reality of the "what."

¹Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, I, 302.

²Point of View, p. 153.

In short, Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity does involve an objective element. It is only pure objectivism which he attacks. In his view, the paradox of Christianity is closely related to subjectivity. As we shall see later, he insists that the paradox of Christianity can only be appropriated by subjectivity.

iv. The Priority of the Individual

The category of the individual is an important theme in Kierkegaard's works.

In every one of the pseudonymous works this theme of 'the individual' comes to evidence in one way or another; but there the individual is predominantly the pre-eminent individual in the aesthetic sense, the distinguished person, &c. In every one of my edifying works the theme of 'the individual' comes to evidence, and as officially as possible; but there the individual is what every man is or ought to be.¹

This is also the case in his Journal, particularly in later years, where the expression of "the individual" is found again and again. He even requests: "Yet had I to crave an inscription on my grave I would ask for none other than 'the individual'--and even if it is not understood now, then in truth it will be."²

Kierkegaard holds that the crowd is untruth.

¹Point of View, p. 124.

²Journals, no. 723.

A crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction.¹

According to Kierkegaard, truth is not determined by mere numbers. On the contrary, "the truth consists precisely in that individual."² The superiority of the individual over the universal is precisely the nature of Christian faith. He asserts, "Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior."³ If the crowd or the race is to be the court of last resort or even have subordinate jurisdiction, Christianity is abolished. Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegelianism is due to the fact that "Hegel makes men into heathens, into a race of animals gifted with reason."⁴ Thus his category of the individual is corrective to his time, for "without this category pantheism has triumphed absolutely."⁵

Kierkegaard maintains that the category of the individual "is the principle of Christianity."⁶ It has a biblical

¹ Point of View, p. 117.

² Ibid.

³ Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 66. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Fear.

⁴ Journals, no. 313.

⁵ Point of View, p. 134.

⁶ Journals, no. 632.

basis. "Just because the individual is created in the image of God 'the individual' is above the race."¹ The pre-requisite to become a Christian is willingness to be the individual. For the individual is "the category of the spirit, of spiritual awakening,"² and man is to be related to God "as a single person."³

Kierkegaard's insistence upon the individual is for emphasizing the responsibility of the individual as a Christian. It is a corrective to the universal and abstract view of man, and thus safeguards the choice and freedom of the individual. The category of the individual and the concept of paradox are closely related in Kierkegaard's thought. As Per Lønning states:

No one can ever become an 'individual' except by accepting 'the paradox' of the eternal God who is concerned with my individual and temporal life, and no one can believe this 'paradox' unless he has experienced himself to be 'the individual,' unable to hide anyone.⁴

v. The Duality of Thought and Existence

In Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegelianism, we have shown that the basic criticism of Kierkegaard is against Hegel's

¹Ibid., no. 313.

²Point of View, p. 132.

³The Last Years, p. 101.

⁴Per Lønning, "Kierkegaard's Paradox," in Kierkegaard Symposium, p. 156.

identification of thought and being, essence and existence. This criticism points to the duality of thought and existence in Kierkegaard's mind. He insists that thought and existence are two different things, for "it is one thing to think, and another thing to exist in what has been thought."¹

Kierkegaard maintains that thought and existence belong to two different spheres. Thought belongs to the sphere of possibility, disinterestedness, and objectivity, whereas existence belongs to the sphere of actuality, passion, and subjectivity.² Existence is in a state of change, and "the transition takes place with freedom."³ But thought is a matter of necessity, and hence it is impotent to deal with the problem of existence. Since the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ has happened in history, the sphere of existence, not thought, this leads Kierkegaard to affirm, as we shall see later, that the God-man, the absolute paradox, is not the object of reason, but faith.

2. Method

Kierkegaard's method is indirect. A great many of his works are published under a variety of pseudonyms, such as Victor Eremita, Frater Taciturnus, Hilarious Bookbinder,

¹ Postscript, p. 228.

² Ibid., p. 302.

³ Fragments, p. 93.

Johannes Climacus, anti-Climacus, and so forth. His use of indirect method or indirect communication is not accidental. He says that it is his relationship to Regine that teaches him "indirect communication."¹ This is true because what he wants to say to Regine cannot be said except by way of indirect communication. This is the personal reason advanced by Kierkegaard for using pseudonyms in three of his aesthetic writings: Either/Or, Repetition, and Fear and Trembling. These books are written at least in part for communicating with Regine after their separation, while Kierkegaard still hopes to become reconciled with her.² Hence, there is no doubt that Regine can better understand these books than any other readers. After Regine's commitment to another man, Kierkegaard still retains the use of indirect method for other more profound reasons, though they are never wholly absent even in the earliest aesthetic writings.

Kierkegaard insists that direct communication can be applied only to objective truth.

Objective thinking is wholly indifferent to subjectivity, and hence also to inwardness and appropriation; its mode of communication is therefore direct.³

¹ Papier, X3 A413, quoted in T. H. Croxall, Kierkegaard Commentary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 38.

² Cf. Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, I, 192, 254-258.

³ Postscript, p. 70.

Thus, direct communication is inadequate for communicating ethico-religious truth. "Direct communication presupposes certainty; but certainty is impossible for anyone in process of becoming."¹ The religious individual can never use direct communication precisely because he himself is constantly in process of becoming inwardly or in inwardness. Moreover, the direct form of communication gives us only results. But Kierkegaard affirms, "If inwardness is the truth, results are only rubbish with which we should not trouble each other."²

Kierkegaard holds that ethico-religious truth is no finality or result. Ethico-religious truth concerns not only what one learns but also how one appropriates it. Such truth must be appropriated subjectively and by one's own effort. This is the reason why

S. K. exacts of his reader a very great effort. He declines to make things easy for him by presenting a 'result,' and he obliges him, therefore, to approach the goal by the same difficult path he himself has trod.³

The purpose of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity is to permit the problems to appear by themselves, to make them problems of universal validity, and to remove as far as possible the author's personality. Thus, the decision about the truth

¹Ibid., p. 68.

²Ibid., p. 216.

³Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, I, preface, vii,

becomes a personal matter, left for each individual reader.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard's use of indirect method is relevant to the religious situation of his day. The Christians of his day have only an aesthetic grasp upon the meaning of Christianity. They accept Christianity as a customary way of life. The illusion consists in the fact that a man thinks he is a Christian and yet lives on an aesthetic level. In such a situation it is difficult to introduce Christianity in a direct manner.

A direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion, and at the same time embitters him. There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion, if one wishes to dispel it.¹

In this case, if the religious writer wants to get into touch with people, "he must begin with aesthetic achievement."²

Kierkegaard regards indirect method as "the secret of the art of helping others."³ In order to help others effectively one must first of all understand the position of others and begin by assuming their ideas. As Hermann Diem puts it, "You do not begin thus: 'What I preach is Christianity,' whereas you are living on a purely aesthetic level.' No, you begin thus: 'Let us talk about

¹Point of View, p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 26.

³Ibid., p. 27.

aesthetic."¹ In a sense, this is a method of "deception." Kierkegaard is not hesitant to admit that "the whole of the aesthetic work, viewed in relation to the work as a whole, is a deception."² But he has a justification for doing that. Like Socrates, he says that "one can deceive a person into the truth."³ In other words, his indirect method is a device for introducing Christianity into Christendom.

In short, indirect method is adopted by Kierkegaard as a corrective to his religious situation. It also provides a significant way for communicating ethico-religious truth. He asserts, that Christ "is a sign, the sign of contradiction, and so all direct communication is impossible."⁴ The system can be directly communicated, whereas the paradox of Christianity cannot.

¹Hermann Diem, Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence, trans. Harold Knight (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. 58.

²Point of View, p. 39.

³Ibid.

⁴Training in Christianity, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 134. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Training.

CHAPTER IV
THE NATURE OF KIERKEGAARD'S PARADOX

Paradox is a central concept in Kierkegaard's thought. He explicitly states that "Christianity is precisely paradoxical,"¹ and "once for all the paradox, and paradoxical at every point."² He further declares, "The idea of philosophy is mediation--Christianity's is the paradox."³ He even affirms that his whole life is lived in "the sphere of paradox."⁴

The word "paradox" in Kierkegaard's writings appears almost countless times. It is reported that there are 595 uses of the word in the 15 volumes of his Samlede Vaeker in English translation.⁵ Of course, this number does not include the 11 volumes of his Papier and his book On Authority and Revelation. Among all his works, the Postscript and the Fragments are considered the two most essential books on paradox. We are told that the word "paradox" appears 308 times in the former and 103 times in the latter.⁶ This, at least, shows that paradox is discussed more thoroughly in these two books than in any other books.

¹Postscript, p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 194.

³Journals, no. 356.

⁴The Last Years, p. 192.

⁵Leroy Seat's dissertation, "The Meaning of Paradox," p. 88.

⁶Ibid., p. 89.

As we have pointed out in the first chapter, there are various senses of the word "paradox" in our common usage. For Kierkegaard, our common usage of the word "paradox" is inadequate to interpret the truth of Christianity. Our investigation of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is an attempt to show what his paradox is and why our common usage of the word "paradox" is inadequate for him to interpret the truth of Christianity. Therefore, in this chapter we shall first deal with the general characteristics of Kierkegaard's paradox, and then discuss the purpose of his paradox.

It must be noted that this chapter is intended to be purely an objective analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox. The writer at this stage will not give his own criticism. However, a separate chapter (Chapter VII) will be developed for the purpose of critical evaluation.

1. The Characteristics of Paradox

Kierkegaard does not state clearly his definition of paradox. The following is our attempt to characterize his concept of paradox.

1. For Kierkegaard, paradox is a category or concept referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities. This statement requires a careful explanation.

First, paradox itself is a category or concept devised

by Kierkegaard for interpreting the truth of Christianity. He states, "The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological definition which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and eternal truth."¹ For him, paradox is a positive rather than negative category. "There is only one mistake in Kant's theory of radical evil. He does not make it clear that the inexplicable, the paradox, is a category of its own."²

Secondly, although paradox itself is a category or concept, Kierkegaard maintains that it does not cease to be a mere concept. He asserts that paradox is not an empty concept but has reference to reality. This is the reason why he reacts against any attempt "to reducing the term paradox to a mere rhetorical expression."³

Thirdly, paradox refers to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities rather than existential entities themselves. For example, Kierkegaard insists that the Incarnation is a paradox. "That God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox sensu strictissimo, the absolute paradox."⁴

¹ Journals, no. 633. It should be pointed out here that Kierkegaard often uses the articles "the" and "a" ambiguously in his writings. In this quotation "the paradox" does not mean a particular paradox (such as the paradox of Incarnation) but his view of paradox in general. He often states that the Incarnation is "the paradox." This is also misleading, for it should be called "a paradox" among his other paradoxes.

² Ibid.

³ Postscript, p. 197.

⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

According to Kierkegaard, the Incarnation is a paradox in the sense of the joint relationship between God and man, and this is independent of the question whether God or man is paradoxical.

Fourthly, paradox involves two opposite existential entities. For Kierkegaard, God and man are two qualitatively different beings. In the Postscript he asserts that there is an "absolute difference between God and man."¹ In the Fragments he explains that God is absolutely unlike man due to human sin.²

Lastly, paradox refers to the joint relationship between two existential entities rather than two pure concepts. In this sense, Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is existential rather than logical, for it refers to existence rather than pure thought. Logical paradox is an assertion of both A and non-A at the same time on the level of pure thought, such as an assertion of "a round square." For Kierkegaard, logical paradox is a mere contradiction and therefore is sheerly nonsensical. Kierkegaard stresses that the Christian should not believe nonsense.

Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it; but he makes so much use of the understanding that he becomes aware of

¹Ibid., p. 195.

²Fragments, p. 58.

the incomprehensible, and then he holds to this, believing against the understanding.¹

In Kierkegaard's view, paradox consists of two opposite existential entities, such as God and man, freedom and necessity, eternity and time. Paradox consists not in the joint relationship between an existential entity and a pure concept. In this respect, the joint relationship between God and mankind (the abstract concept of man) is not a paradox. For Kierkegaard, the paradox of Incarnation consists in the fact that God has become not the universal man but a particular person in a particular time and space. "The paradox consists principally in the fact that God, the Eternal, came into existence in time as a particular man."²

Likewise, paradox consists not in the joint relationship between an existential entity and language or idea about this existential entity. Hugh Ross Mackintosh fails to recognize this point when he interprets Kierkegaard's paradox. He writes:

To hold that God can be known 'directly,' Kierkegaard urges, is to think as the heathen do. When the Word of God passes into and takes shape in the inadequate medium of human idea and speech, it is unavoidably refracted in antinomy.³

Thus, according to Mackintosh, Kierkegaard's paradox consists

¹ Postscript, p. 504.

² Ibid., p. 528.

³ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 235.

in the relationship between the infinite God and finite human thought and language. This could be a paradox. But it is certainly not Kierkegaard's paradox, for the latter refers to two opposite existential entities.

In this respect, Kierkegaard's view of paradox is different from D. M. Baillie's view of paradox. According to Baillie, religious paradox is caused by the relationship between the infinite God and finite human thought and words. He asserts:

The reason why the element of paradox comes into all religious thought and statement is because God cannot be comprehended in any human words or in any of the categories of our finite thought.¹

11. For Kierkegaard, paradox is absolute rather than relative. He holds that paradox cannot be resolved by human reason.

The absurd, the paradox is constructed in such a way that in fact reason could not by its own power reduce it to nonsense and show its emptiness. No; it is a sign, an enigma faced with which reason can only say: 'I cannot resolve it; for me that is not intelligible.'²

According to Hegel, the difference between thesis and antithesis is not absolute; hence it can be resolved into a higher unity. But this is not the case with Kierkegaard's paradox. For him, the difference between thesis and antithesis is absolute. For example, in the paradox of Incarnation,

¹D. M. Baillie, God Was In Christ (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 108.

²Papier, X2 A354, cited in J. Heywood Thomas, Subjectivity and Paradox, p. 121.

the distinction between God and a particular man is so absolute that it cannot be annulled into any higher unity. Thus, he states, "That God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox sensu strictissimo, the absolute paradox."¹ He further asserts, "The absolute paradox, just because it is absolute, can be relevant only to the absolute difference that distinguishes man from God."² Furthermore, the absoluteness of Kierkegaard's paradox lies in the fact that, as we shall see later, his paradox is not the object of reason (i.e. abstract logical function); hence reason cannot deal with or resolve his paradox.

In The Oxford English Dictionary there are two main usages of the word "paradox." The first usage is: "A statement or tenet contrary to received opinion or belief."³ This usage cannot fit the meaning of Kierkegaard's paradox. Paradox in such an usage is not absolute, for the received opinion or belief can be changed from time to time. Another usage is: "A statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may

¹Postscript, p. 187.

²Ibid., p. 195.

³The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), VIII, 450.

prove to be ill-founded."¹ This is a relative paradox. One example can be given from Luther's view of Christian liberty. He states, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."² This statement seems to assert a contradiction, yet on examination the contradiction is resolved, for the Christian is free from ethical rules but bound to every man in love. Thus, this usage too cannot be applied to Kierkegaard's paradox. For Kierkegaard, paradox is absolute rather than relative.

iii. For Kierkegaard, paradox is beyond the comprehension of reason in the sense of traditional logic. The relationship between Kierkegaard's paradox and reason is a controversial issue among the interpreters of Kierkegaard. The writer will discuss this issue and present his interpretation more fully later. At this present juncture, we shall give only a brief interpretation.

Before we discuss the relationship between Kierkegaard's paradox and reason, it is necessary for us to know his view of reason. His view of reason is that of traditional logic. This is an important point to remember. We shall deal with this point in more detail later. Kierkegaard insists that

¹ Ibid.

² John Dillenberger (ed.), Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 53.

paradox is beyond reason in the sense that it cannot be comprehended by traditional logic. Traditional logic deals only with pure concepts but not existential entities. Thus, Kierkegaard states that logic "is indifferent to existence in the sense of actuality."¹ Although paradox itself is a concept and has reference to reality, Kierkegaard is concerned with paradox as a reality rather than paradox as a pure concept. He uses the word "paradox" mainly in the sense of a reality rather than a concept. In his philosophy there is a duality of thought and existence, and his primary concern is existence rather than thought.

Since traditional logic is incapable to deal with existence, Kierkegaard maintains that paradox is "the incomprehensible,"² which "history can never digest or convert into a common syllogism."³ He further asserts, that the eternal God has become a particular man in time is "the most improbable of things."⁴ In short, Kierkegaard's paradox is beyond reason.

iv. For Kierkegaard, paradox is the object of faith rather than the object of reason. It is his contention that paradox belongs to the realm of existence and therefore cannot be apprehended by reason (i.e. traditional logic).

¹ Postscript, p. 101.

² Ibid., p. 498.

³ Training, p. 33.

⁴ Fragments, p. 65.

According to him, existence and thought belong to two different realms.¹ The realm of existence includes the characteristics of actuality, freedom, concreteness, becoming, particularity, and approximation; hence it is the object of faith. The realm of thought includes the features of possibility, necessity, abstractness, unchanging, universality, and certainty; hence it is the object of reason (i.e. traditional logic).²

Kierkegaard holds that paradox belongs to the realm of existence, hence it is the object of faith. Thus he states, "Faith is itself a miracle, and all that holds true of the Paradox also holds true of Faith."³ Moreover, he affirms that "the God-Man exists only for faith."⁴ We shall further discuss the relationship between Kierkegaard's paradox and faith later.

To sum up, the characteristics of Kierkegaard's paradox are as follows. (1) Paradox is a category or concept referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities. (2) Paradox is absolute rather than relative. (3) Paradox is beyond the comprehension of reason in the sense of traditional logic. (4) Paradox is the object of faith rather than the object of reason.

¹We shall criticize this point along with other points in the Chapter VI.

²Postscript, pp. 101, 228, 302; Fragments, p. 93.

³Fragments, p. 81.

⁴Training, p. 122.

2. Paradox and Reason

The relationship between Kierkegaard's paradox and reason has been a very controversial issue. This is, in a certain extent, due to the lack of clarity in Kierkegaard's writings, for he has never attempted to write a systematic work. He seldom gives definitions to the words which he uses. This inevitably leads to a lot of misunderstanding concerning his thought, particularly his concept of paradox.

Now we shall first present various interpretations of Kierkegaard's paradox in relation to reason. Next, we shall comment on these interpretations and try to suggest a more adequate interpretation.

1. Various Interpretations

There are various interpretations of Kierkegaard's paradox in relation to reason. They may be classified into three major types: paradox against reason, paradox above reason, and paradox both against and above reason.

(1) Paradox against Reason

There are many thinkers who insist that Kierkegaard's paradox is against reason, namely that we can accept his paradox only at the cost of rejecting all rational order. This view would identify Kierkegaard's position with Tertullian's, namely credo quia absurdum. To present this view, we shall deal with the following thinkers: John A. Bain, H. J. Paton, and L. Harold DeWolf.

(a) In his book Søren Kierkegaard, Bain argues that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist and in him "an irrational intellectualism is introduced into the realm of faith."¹

Bain's argumentation can be summarized as follows. First, Kierkegaard is an irrationalist, for he "argues that there is no intellectual proof of Christianity."² For Kierkegaard, it is wrong to establish the objective truth of Christianity

¹John A. Bain, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 77.

²Ibid., p. 73.

and to build our faith on intellectual proof. Secondly, Kierkegaard's paradox is nonsensical to reason. "The incarnation brings us face to face with something it is impossible for the intellect to accept. To the mind it is nonsense."¹ Thirdly, Kierkegaard's paradox endangers the possibility of religious knowledge; it "strikes at the root of all possibility of knowing anything of God and the future life."² If there is an infinite qualitative chasm between God and man, it is impossible to make any reliable statement about God. Lastly, Kierkegaard is self-contradictory when he uses reason to fight against reason. "To use reason to prove the untrustworthiness of reason is to commit intellectual suicide."³ From the above argumentation, Bain concludes that Kierkegaard is anti-rational and against the teaching of Christianity, for God's appeal to us is: "Come now and let us reason together."⁴

(b) In The Modern Predicament H. J. Paton characterizes Kierkegaard's thought as "the way of absurdity." Kierkegaard's view is "not merely to abandon thinking, but to spurn and deride it, to welcome paradox and to glorify inconsistency."⁵ According to Paton, Kierkegaard shows no interest in science

¹Ibid., p. 75.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 80.

⁴Ibid., p. 81.

⁵H. J. Paton, The Modern Predicament (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 120.

or in the bearing of science on religion, and denies any objective basis for religion. Kierkegaard's motto is credo quia absurdum, and he carries it to the utmost length. Hence, Kierkegaard's "popularity to-day is a sign of the dangerous pass to which we have come--a mark of desperation and despair."¹

(c) In The Religious Revolt Against Reason DeWolf argues that Kierkegaard is the greatest modern proponent of the religious revolt against reason.

The remarkable influence of irrationalism among educated men today is largely due to the critical and literary genius of its greatest proponent, Søren Kierkegaard.²

According to DeWolf, Kierkegaard's irrationalism can be stated in four ways. First, Kierkegaard opposes the objectivity of reason.³ For him, objective detachment is very good in mathematics but not in Christianity. Objectivity is completely alien to the truth of Christianity; hence it "is not only unchristian; it is impossible."⁴ Kierkegaard insists that in Christianity subjectivity is superior to objectivity. It is only by subjectivity that one can know the truth about God.

Secondly, Kierkegaard charges against the presumption

¹Ibid., p. 121.

²L. Harold DeWolf, The Religious Revolt Against Reason (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 33.

³Ibid., pp. 60-70.

⁴Ibid., p. 63.

of reason.¹ He holds that ~~supreme~~ faith in reason is idolatry.

To allow reason to determine the content of religious doctrine is, then, a form of idolatry, the more ludicrous because in practicing it a man puts himself in the place of God. When this idolatry is practiced, others follow.²

Thirdly, Kierkegaard criticizes the ineffectiveness of reason.³ He maintains that reason never attains certainty, but only approximation. The truth of Christianity is achieved not by knowledge but by will. Faith is a passionate, decisive act which denies any objective security. For Kierkegaard, the Christian must obey the divine authority, and doubt is unbelief which is caused by sin and which cannot be cured by reason but by faith. Human reason can deal with thought but not existence. Moreover, reason cannot discover God, nor understand Him even when He reveals Himself because God is the Wholly Other.

Fourthly, Kierkegaard criticizes reason for its evil results.⁴ He insists that trust in reason tends to be substituted for decision, for reason requires objectivity and detachment. Dependence on reason tends also to lead to pantheism.

Since every pantheism makes the individual man in some sense identical with God or at least a moment or fragment of His being, Kierkegaard viewed this aspect of 'the System' with

¹ Ibid., pp. 70-74.

² Ibid., p. 73.

³ Ibid., pp. 74-96.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 96-105.

especially deep hostility.¹

From the above argumentation, DeWolf concludes that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist and his paradox is self-contradictory and "threatens the very possibility of communication."² DeWolf asserts that paradoxes

are useful so long as we look for the truth, not in them, but in a new rational synthesis beyond them. This does not appear to be the intention of Kierkegaard nor of the men most influenced by him.³

(2) Paradox above Reason

In opposition to the view of paradox against reason, there are Kierkegaardian scholars who insist that Kierkegaard's paradox is above reason, namely that reason is irrelevant to the realm of faith. For them, Kierkegaard's paradox is a category of faith, not reason. To present this view, we shall deal with the following scholars: J. Heywood Thomas, N. H. Sørensen, and Per Lønning.

(a) In his Subjectivity and Paradox Thomas argues that "Kierkegaard was no irrationalist--any more than he was some other '-ist.'"⁴ Thomas' position can be summarized as follows.

First, Thomas opposes the idea that Kierkegaard's

¹Ibid., p. 99.

²Ibid., p. 141.

³Ibid., p. 142.

⁴J. Heywood Thomas, Subjectivity and Paradox, p. 116.

paradox is a rational synthesis of the finite and the infinite, and insists that it is not rational but historical. "The Postscript and Training in Christianity are quite definite on the point that it is the historicity of the God-man that makes it a paradox of an absolute kind."¹ Secondly, Kierkegaard's paradox is subjective. It is closely related to the ideas of subjectivity and the leap. Hence, it is wrong "to call Kierkegaard an 'irrationalist.'"² Thirdly, that Kierkegaard's paradox consists of concepts does not necessarily imply being intellectualistic. "It would be like saying that a person who says that $4+10=15$ and $5+6=10$ is really being very intellectualistic because he presupposes the addibility of numbers."³ In view of the above considerations, Thomas concludes the statement: "The charge of intellectualistic anti-rationalism is therefore false."⁴

(b) In his article "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox" N. H. Sørensen argues that Kierkegaard's paradox is beyond reason, and there is no conflict between his paradox and reason. Sørensen believes that true faith, in Kierkegaard's words, "breathes healthily and blissfully in the absurd" (X6 B 79). Thus, "for Kierkegaard the 'paradox' is an expression for what is supra rationem rather than for what is contra

¹Ibid., p. 116.

²Ibid.,

³Ibid., pp. 116-17.

⁴Ibid., p. 118.

rationem."¹ Søren's argumentation can be summarized as follows.

First, Kierkegaard emphatically insists that Christianity is not a doctrine. If Christianity is not doctrinal but existential, it cannot contradict reason. Secondly, his paradox is not an offense against reason but against heart.

In Philosophical Fragments it is asserted that the Incarnation 'is folly to the understanding and an offense to the human heart.' Here the offense caused by the paradox is not seen in relation to the mind but to the heart.²

Thirdly, Christianity is not irrational but non-rational.

The paradox cannot be understood by reason.

When he [Kierkegaard] states repeatedly...that the important thing is "to understand that faith cannot be understood," this has nothing to do with "irrational practical experience" as opposed to clear thinking. It is merely the way in which the honest thinker expresses his recognition of the fact that the content of religious doctrines cannot be proved necessary.³

Fourthly, Kierkegaard clearly states that the paradox is not self-contradictory. In his Journal "Kierkegaard asserts plainly and objectively that there is 'no self-contradiction' in the idea that 'Christ was God in the guise of a servant' [X2 A 5297]."⁴ Finally, Kierkegaard has made two senses of the word "absurd." The paradox as the absurd must be distinguished from the absurd which is mere nonsense. Thus

¹N. H. Sørensen, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox," in A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 209.

²Ibid., p. 216.

³Ibid., p. 218.

⁴Ibid., p. 219.

Søe concludes that the paradox is not contradictory to reason but beyond reason.

(c) In his article "Kierkegaard's Paradox," Per Lønning argues that Kierkegaard's paradox is not determined by reason but by existence. "The primary concern of the paradox is not reason, but I, the existing I, the individual entirely separated from God and entirely loved by God."¹ The primary function of the paradox is to define the relation between Christianity and human existence.

As an existing man I have the task imposed upon me to realize my individual existence as a synthesis of time and eternity. Christianity means continuity, because it affirms this task; and it means discontinuity, because it denies my ability of performing it.²

This shows that the paradox is not concerned with reason but existence. Although Lønning does not claim his view as either against or above reason, in view of his insistence that the paradox "is not primarily determined by reason, but by existence,"³ we can classify his position as that of paradox above reason.

(3) Paradox both against and above Reason

The third position is that Kierkegaard's paradox is both against and above reason. This is the position of Herbert

¹Per Lønning, "Kierkegaard's Paradox," in Kierkegaard Symposium, p. 164.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 165.

M. Garelick. In The Anti-Christianity of Kierkegaard Garelick argues that Kierkegaard's paradox is "both against and beyond reason," and that this is "not a self-contradictory position."¹

Garelick asserts that Kierkegaard's paradox is against reason in the following sense.

This Paradox is the ultimate challenge to the intellect, for all attempts to understand it must conform to the laws of judgment and discourse: identity, contradiction, and excluded middle. Yet the Paradox violates these laws. To say that at the same time and in the same respect one is and is not finite is to speak nonsense, or, worse, it is madness. Rationally, the statement "God-man" is a nonsensical statement.²

This means that the paradox violates the laws of reason; hence it is against reason.

Garelick also shows that Kierkegaard's paradox is above reason. The paradox is beyond the reach of reason. "Since reason is limited to the logical sphere only, it cannot make judgements about the reality or existence of the Paradox but only about its rationality."³ This interpretation, says Garelick, is based on a statement in Kierkegaard's Journal:

A true sentence of Hugh of St. Victor: "In things which are above reason, faith is not really supported by reason, because reason cannot grasp what faith believes; but there is also a something here as a result of which reason is determined,

¹ Herbert M. Garelick, The Anti-Christianity of Kierkegaard (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 44.

² Ibid., p. 28.

³ Ibid., p. 44.

or which determines reason to honor faith which it cannot perfectly understand."¹

This shows that faith is above reason because it is not supported by reason. The paradox is supported by faith rather than reason; hence it is beyond reason.

Now if Kierkegaard's paradox is both against and above reason, is this not a self-contradictory position? No.

Garelick answers:

The two notions are not contradictory; they refer to different aspects of reason, faith against reason, indicating reason's right to judge rationality or irrationality, faith above reason, indicating reason's recognition of the impossibility of judging the reality of that which denies reason. For Climacus reason is against faith and faith above reason.²

This means that if two aspects of reason are indicated, there is no contradiction to maintain the view of both against and above reason. On the one hand, reason has the right to judge rationality, in this sense the paradox is against reason; on the other hand, reason has no right to judge reality, in this sense the paradox is beyond reason.

ii. Toward A More Adequate Interpretation

After having discussed the three types of interpretation concerning Kierkegaard's paradox and reason, we shall now comment on these various positions and suggest a more

¹Ibid., cited from Papier, X2 A 354.

²Ibid., p. 45.

adequate interpretation. The position of the writer is basically in agreement with the second type of interpretation, namely, that Kierkegaard's paradox is above reason, and yet some important modifications must be made.

We shall first state the reason why the second type of interpretation does more justice to Kierkegaard's view. After that we shall make some important modifications of this type of interpretation.

(1) No Contradiction between Paradox and Reason

There is an ambiguity concerning the relation between the paradox and reason in Kierkegaard's writings. This ambiguity probably springs mainly from his manner of expression rather than from his basic conception.

It is true that there are statements in Kierkegaard's writings which seem to assert irrationalism. In his writings the word "absurd" is often connected with the paradox or faith. In the Fragments Kierkegaard states, "The Reason says that the Paradox is absurd, but this is mere mimicry, since the Paradox is the Paradox, quia absurdum."¹ In Fear and Trembling he says that Abraham "believed by virtue of the absurd."² In the Postscript it is further stated that the absurd "can only be believed;"³ Christianity "has proclaimed

¹ Fragments, p. 65.

² Fear, p. 46.

³ Postscript, p. 190.

itself as the Paradox," and this is "an absurdity to the understanding."¹ Because of these statements, Kierkegaard has been easily identified with irrationalism, and his thought with "the way of absurdity."²

There are other statements in Kierkegaard's writings which seem to assert that the paradox is against reason. In Training in Christianity Kierkegaard affirms that the paradox "conflicts with reason and therefore is an object of faith."³ In the Postscript it is further asserted that the paradox is "in direct opposition to all human reason,"⁴ and that "this is a breach with all thinking,"⁵ and "the crucifixion of the understanding."⁶ From these statements, one can readily conclude that the paradox is against reason, and that "sacrifice of the intellect is imperative."⁷

However, we must remember that there are also other statements in Kierkegaard's writings which assert clearly that the paradox is above reason. In his Journal Kierkegaard writes:

What I am accustomed to express in this way:
that Christianity lies in the Paradox, Philosophy
in Mediation, Leibniz also expresses by making
the distinction between what is above Reason
and what is against Reason. Belief is above
Reason.

¹Ibid., p. 191.

²H. J. Paton, The Modern Predicament, pp. 119-20.

³Training, p. 29.

⁴Postscript, p. 189.

⁵Ibid., p. 513.

⁶Ibid., p. 500.

⁷H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, p. 246.

Reason.¹

In another entry in his Journal, Kierkegaard tries to distinguish his paradox from other paradoxes. He writes, "There is a view of the world according to which Paradox is above all System."² In 1850, when Kierkegaard was reading Helfferich's Die christliche Mystik, he came across a statement of Hugo de St. Victor with which he fully agrees. This is what he writes in his Journal:

A true sentence of Hugo de St Victor (Helfferich: Mystik, Vol. I, 368).

"In things which are above reason faith is not really supported by reason, because reason cannot grasp what faith believes; but there is also a something here as a result of which reason is determined, or which determines reason to honour faith which it cannot perfectly understand."

That is what I explained (e.g. in the Final Postscript); not every absurdity is 'the absurd' or the paradox. The effect of reason is in fact to know the paradox negatively--but not more.³

These statements in Kierkegaard's Journal really support the view that paradox is above reason.

Now if some of Kierkegaard's statements seem to support the view of paradox against reason, and some the view of paradox beyond reason, it is necessary for us to clarify his position. An examination of his presuppositions seems to shed light on this problem. As has been pointed out earlier, one of Kierkegaard's presuppositions is the duality of

¹Papier, IV C29, cited in J. H. Thomas, Subjectivity and Paradox, p. 119.

²Journals, no. 282.

³Ibid., no. 1033.

thought and existence. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, thought and existence belong to two different realms. He states that "it is one thing to think, and another thing to exist in what has been thought."¹ For him, thought belongs to the realm of possibility, whereas existence belongs to the realm of actuality.² Thought is in a state of necessity, whereas existence is in a state of freedom, for "all coming into existence takes place with freedom, not by necessity."³

The realm of existence is thus characterized as actuality, freedom, concreteness, becoming, particularity, and approximation. For Kierkegaard, this is the realm of faith. The realm of thought is characterized as possibility, necessity, abstractness, unchanging, universality, and certainty. For Kierkegaard, this is the realm of reason. This shows that Kierkegaard's view of reason is that of traditional logic which deals only with pure thought but not existence. He thus asserts, "Tautology is and remains still the supreme principle, the highest law of thought."⁴ Moreover, he states that logic "is indifferent to existence in the sense of actuality."⁵

As we said before, Kierkegaard's paradox is beyond the

¹Postscript, p. 228.

²Ibid., p. 302.

³Fragments, p. 93.

⁴Either/Or, I, p. 37.

⁵Postscript, p. 101.

comprehension of reason in the sense of traditional logic. Now we shall explain this by using an illustration from Kierkegaard's view of the paradox of Incarnation.

(1) The union of God and man in Jesus Christ is a historical event, hence it is an actuality in existence rather than a mere possibility of thought. According to Kierkegaard, reason can deal with possibility but not actuality. Hence, the union of God and man in Jesus Christ is beyond the comprehension of reason.

(2) How the two opposite existential entities, namely God and man, can be united in Jesus Christ is a matter of freedom rather than necessity. Kierkegaard insists that "all coming into existence takes place with freedom, not by necessity."¹ For him, reason deals with necessity but not freedom. Hence, the union of God and man in Jesus Christ is beyond the comprehension of reason.

(3) The union of God and man in Jesus Christ is a concrete event happened in a particular person in a particular time and space. For Kierkegaard, reason deals with abstractness or universality but not concreteness or particularity. Hence, the union of God and man in Jesus Christ is beyond the apprehension of reason.

(4) The Incarnation is a historical event. Kierkegaard

¹Fragments, p. 93.

affirms that "anything historical is merely an approximation."¹ For him, reason deals with certainty but not approximation. Hence, the Incarnation is beyond the apprehension of reason.

Since Kierkegaard regards reason as an abstract logical function and has nothing to do with existence, he affirms, "Thus I always reason from existence, not toward existence."² This, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the reason why Kierkegaard rejects all rational proofs for the existence of God. He insists that existence "is never subject to demonstration."³ Moreover, he maintains that reason is incapable to know the nature of God, for God is "the Unknown" to reason.⁴ Therefore, he states, "The Reason has brought the God as near as possible, and yet he is as far as ever."⁵ For him, reason means traditional logic which operates only in the realm of thought, and does not and cannot deal with the realm of existence.

If Kierkegaard insists on the duality of existence and thought, and if his paradox and reason belong to these two different realms, it follows that there is no contradiction between his paradox and reason. It is a misunderstanding to hold that Kierkegaard's paradox is against reason. For him, paradox is neither rational nor irrational, but supra-rational.

¹ Postscript, p. 26.

² Fragments, p. 50.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

Here we must point out that the word "reason" is used in two different senses in Kierkegaard's writings. One is that of traditional logic which, for him, is the proper function of reason, and which we have been talking. In this sense, reason is "indifferent to existence." The other is Hegelian reason which, in Kierkegaard's opinion, is a misuse of reason, for such a reason deals with not only thought but also existence. Therefore, Hegelian reason is the object of Kierkegaard's attack. For Kierkegaard, Hegel exaggerates the function of reason. Thus, we must not confuse these two different senses of the word "reason" in Kierkegaard's writings. It is unfortunate that Kierkegaard uses the same word "reason" without telling his readers which of these two senses he means.

In the light of the above clarification, we can understand such statements of Kierkegaard that paradox is "above reason," and that paradox "conflicts with reason." For Kierkegaard, paradox is "above reason" in the sense that it cannot be apprehended by traditional logic. When he states that paradox "conflicts with reason," he means that paradox is contradictory from the standpoint of Hegelian reason. But Kierkegaard is convinced that Hegel is wrong in taking this view of reason.

The word "absurd" frequently appears in Kierkegaard's writings. It has confused many of his readers. It has been wrongly identified with nonsense or irrationality. When

Kierkegaard states that the absurd "can only be believed,"¹ he does not assert nonsense or irrationality. In his Journal he reminds us that he uses the word "absurd" in a special sense which differs from "the absurd in the vulgar sense of the word."² Therefore he writes, "That is what I explained (e.g. in the Final Postscript); not every absurdity is 'the absurd' or the paradox."³ As a matter of fact, he often identifies "the absurd" with paradox. "What now is the absurd? The absurd is--that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth."⁴ This definition of the absurd is exactly the same as that of "the absolute paradox," which is: "That God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox sensu strictissimo, the absolute paradox."⁵ In his Journal he further writes, "The Absurd, the Paradox, is so constructed that the reason is by no means able of itself to resolve it into nonsense and show that it is nonsense."⁶ This quotation shows that "the absurd" and "the paradox" are synonymous, and therefore cannot be identified with "nonsense." Thus,

¹ Postscript, p. 190.

² Papier, A6 B8, cited in H. A. Johnson (ed.), A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 219.

³ Journals, no. 1033.

⁴ Postscript, p. 188.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 194-95.

⁶ Papier, A2 A354, cited in A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 186.

Kierkegaard does not advocate "the absurd in the vulgar sense of the word," and his concept of the absurd involves no irrationality or nonsense. Like paradox, Kierkegaard asserts that the absurd is the object of faith. "The absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God."¹ He further states that "true faith breathes healthily and blissfully in the Absurd."²

On the basis of the above discussion, we shall now briefly comment on the arguments advanced by those who interpret Kierkegaard's paradox as against reason. At this stage the writer does not intend to defend or oppose Kierkegaard's view of paradox; his task is to show objectively what he thinks is the true meaning of Kierkegaard's paradox.

There are four points in Bain's argumentation as listed above. The following observations may be made on them. First, it is true that Kierkegaard insists that there is no intellectual proof of Christianity. However, this insistence of Kierkegaard implies suprarationality rather than anti-rationality in his view of Christianity. Secondly, it is true that Kierkegaard's paradox is an offense to reason. However, by reason here Kierkegaard means Hegelian reason which, in Kierkegaard's opinion, oversteps the limits of

¹ Journals, no. 871.

² Papier, X6 B67, cited in H. A. Johnson (ed.) A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 183.

of reason. Kierkegaard maintains that paradox does not contradict reason as long as reason is a mere abstract logical function and stays within the realm of thought. Thirdly, Kierkegaard would not admit that paradox endangers the possibility of all religious knowledge. For him, paradox is the source of religious knowledge and can be apprehended by faith rather than reason. Lastly, it is not self-contradictory that Kierkegaard uses reason to fight against reason if we know what he means. Here the word "reason" is used in two different senses. To be correctly interpreted, Kierkegaard advocates reason as an abstract logical function and opposes Hegel's view of reason which is more than an abstract logical function. For these reasons, the interpretation of Bain is not adequate.

Paton interprets that Kierkegaard's thought is "the way of absurdity," and this is "to welcome paradox and to glorify inconsistency."¹ Here Paton is wrong in his identification of Kierkegaard's paradox with nonsensical absurdity and inconsistency. We have already explained that the word "absurd" in Kierkegaard's usage is different from the absurd in a vulgar sense of the word and is synonymous with the word "paradox." For Kierkegaard, paradox is an existential paradox rather than a logical paradox, for it refers to

¹H. J. Paton, The Modern Predicament, p. 122.

existence. For him, only logical paradox is a mere inconsistency. Thus Paton's interpretation is also not adequate.

DeWolf has four points in his argumentation. According to him, the irrationalism of Kierkegaard is seen in his charge against the objectivity of reason, the presumption of reason, the ineffectiveness of reason, and the evil results of reason.¹ Here we must say that DeWolf is right in interpreting Kierkegaard's view of reason. First, Kierkegaard's view of reason is objectivity, for it rejects personal involvement and is indifferent to existence. Secondly, Kierkegaard holds that supreme faith in reason is presumptuous, for reason is incapable to apprehend religion. Thirdly, he maintains that reason is ineffective in religion, for reason deals only with pure thought but not existence. Fourthly, it is his contention that trust in reason tends to be objectively detached and therefore postpones decision. However, DeWolf is incorrect to call Kierkegaard an irrationalist. Kierkegaard is a suprarationalist rather than an irrationalist. He does not reject reason as such. He recognizes the value of reason in the realm of thought. But he opposes to the view that reason is applicable to religion. For him, religion and reason are in separation rather than in opposition. His view of religion is neither rational nor irrational, but supra-

¹L. H. DeWolf, The Religious Revolt Against Reason, pp. 55-105.

rational. Thus, DeWolf's interpretation is not adequate.

Herbert M. Garelick interprets that Kierkegaard's paradox is both against and beyond reason. The problem of his position lies in his interpretation that Kierkegaard's paradox is against reason. Garelick states that reason has the "right to judge rationality or irrationality," and in this sense faith is against reason, for paradox violates the laws of reason. Garelick is right in saying that reason has the right to judge rationality or irrationality. However, Kierkegaard insists that paradox does not belong to the realm of rationality or irrationality. Kierkegaard's paradox refers to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities rather than two opposite abstract concepts. If his paradox is a purely logical paradox, it surely violates the laws of logic. As we have already explained, his paradox is suprarational rather than rational or irrational. Therefore, his paradox is not against reason. Thus, Garelick's interpretation is not adequate.

In short, there is an duality of thought and existence in Kierkegaard's philosophy. For him, paradox belongs to the realm of existence, whereas reason belongs to the realm of thought. Since his paradox and reason do not exist on the same level, it follows that there is no contradiction between them. His paradox is neither rational nor irrational, but suprarational. In other words, his paradox is beyond reason.

(2) The Function of Reason

If Kierkegaard's paradox is beyond reason in the sense of abstract logical function, one may wonder whether there is room left for reason in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Here we must say that he does not deny the value of reason in the realm of thought. There is no doubt that Kierkegaard well recognizes the full status of reason in the realm of objective truth, such as mathematics.

The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, becomes infinitely indifferent.¹

Since objective truth by its nature is not concerned with the existing subject, reason can perform its full function in this sphere. Moreover, reason performs its Highest function when it admits that Christianity is beyond its power of comprehension. "For it is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are."²

According to Kierkegaard, reason as an abstract logical function has nothing to do with paradox. However, reason has something to do with language or statements about paradox. For him, reason deals only with thought but not existence.

¹Postscript, p. 173.

²Journals, no. 633.

"Thus I always reason from existence, not toward existence."¹
 Kierkegaard's view of religion is beyond the comprehension of reason. Reason has no direct access to religion. However, he maintains that reason has a function in language or statements about religion,,for the problem of language or statements belong to the realm of thought. In our analysis, the function of reason consists of discerning, attentive, and apologetic uses in Kierkegaard's theology.

First, reason has a discerning use. Kierkegaard insists that Christian faith is not a blind faith, for the Christian does not believe nonsense. For Kierkegaard, the problem of nonsense or irrationality belongs to the realm of thought. Therefore, the Christian should use his reason to discern what is nonsensical or irrational and try to prevent him from believing it. This is stated clearly in the Postscript:

So the believing Christian not only possesses but uses his understanding, respects the universal-Human, does not put it down to lack of understanding if somebody is not a Christian; but in relation to Christianity he believes against the understanding and this case also uses understanding . . . to make sure that he believes against the understanding. Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it.²

Likewise, in his Journal Kierkegaard writes:

¹Fragments, p. 50.

²Postscript, p. 504 (Italics mine).

That is what I explained (e.g. in the Final Postscript); not every absurdity is 'the absurd' or the paradox. The effect of reason is in fact to know the paradox negatively--but not more.¹

This means that one must use his reason to distinguish paradox from nonsense or the absurd in a vulgar sense of the word.

Kierkegaard maintains that Christian faith cannot be identified with immediacy or "the first immediacy,"² such as the spontaneous awareness in Schleiermacher's view. Christian faith is a "subsequent immediacy,"³ or "immediacy after reflection."⁴ This means that prior to belief the Christian should use reason to discern and to make sure that he does not have nonsense as the object of belief. But Kierkegaard does not allow reason to determine the content of faith. For him, the law of reason is tautology. "Tautology is and remains still the supreme principle, the highest law of thought."⁵ This indicates that reason cannot provide the content for faith. Reason does prepare the way for faith, but "faith begins precisely there where thinking leaves off."⁶

¹Journals, no. 1033.

³Ibid.

⁵Either/Or, I, 37.

²Fear, p. 92.

⁴Journals, no. 754.

⁶Fear, p. 64.

Secondly, reason has a descriptive use. For Kierkegaard, although reason as an abstract logical function cannot apprehend God's revelation, it can describe the concrete data of religious experience. He holds that faith is the only faculty which can grasp and know God's revelation. The task of reason is not to construct but to describe the data as they are experienced. As John Wild points out, "Instead of wasting his time on constructive interpretation and system building, he [Kierkegaard] devotes himself to the accurate description of facts as they are given in the concrete."¹ This shows that reason has to do with statements about faith but not with faith itself.

Thirdly, reason has an attentive use. In the Fragments Kierkegaard denies the possibility of the proofs for the existence of God, for existence must be given rather than proven. This means that reason can only assume the matter of existence but cannot prove it. However, in Training in Christianity he admits that historical proofs may be useful in a certain sense. He points out that Jesus has appealed to historical proofs in order to tell John that he was the Expected One.

He [Jesus] points to the miracles (the lame walk, the blind see, &c.) and to the doctrine (the Gospel is preached to the poor)--and thereupon,

¹ John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 54.

strangely enough, He adds, 'Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me.'¹

The usefulness of historical proofs lies in the fact that they may arouse attention rather than prove reality.

He /Christ/ makes it evident that in religion to Him there can be no question of any proofs, that a man does not come to Him by the help of proofs, that there is no direct transition to this thing of becoming a Christian, that at the most the proofs might serve to make a man attentive, so that once he has become attentive he may arrive at the point of deciding whether he will believe or be offended.²

This means that from historical evidences one cannot prove the divinity of Christ. We cannot make a man to become a Christian simply by showing objective proofs, for there is no direct transition from objective proofs to subjective faith. To become a Christian is a matter of free choice in man's will. But these proofs may make one attentive to the fact that Christianity does have a historical basis.

Fourthly, reason has an apologetic use. Kierkegaard has often been criticized for neglecting the importance of apologetics. This criticism is false. His writing on the Fragments and the Postscript is a clear indication that he has an apologetic concern for Christianity. He writes these two books mainly to protest against Hegel's distortion of Christianity. Kierkegaard does so from a logical standpoint.

¹Training, p. 97.

As Paul L. Holmer has pointed out;

Kierkegaard met propositional truth with propositional truth, which was the only way he could have carried on intelligible discourse. Conversation depends upon a medium, a realm of universals--and this Kierkegaard knew as well as we do. Therefore the quarrel with Hegel is really over the nature of thought. Kierkegaard finds Hegel to be wrong when he compares Hegel's logic with that demanded by the logical order.¹

Kierkegaard is well aware that logic is a necessary instrument for the interpretation of Christianity. He even argues objectively and detachedly about the necessity of subjectivity and passion in the sphere of religion.

In order to have a meaningful dialogue between Christianity and the dominating philosophy of his time, Kierkegaard even translates the Gospel into philosophical terms, for example, the words God and man are often translated into eternity and time, etc. As Niels Thulstrup states:

It is correct that in Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard takes his point of departure in "the Socratic" and that in proceeding he makes extensive use of the expressions and language of Idealism Kierkegaard therefore translated as much of the language of the Gospel into contemporary philosophical terms as he regarded necessary to set forth the difference between contemporary philosophy and Christianity.²

¹Paul L. Holmer, "Kierkegaard and the Truth" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1946), p. 274.

²Niels Thulstrup, "Introduction," in Fragments, p. xci.

This does not mean that Kierkegaard is a philosophical idealist in his characterization of Christianity. However, this does show that he makes use of reason to restate Christian faith in order to have a dialogue with contemporary philosophy.

To sum up, although Kierkegaard emphasizes the limits of reason, he does not reject the value of reason in the realm of thought. He insists that reason as an abstract logical function has no direct access to religion. However, reason has a function in language or statements about religion, namely discerning nonsense and preventing one from believing it, describing the data of religious experience, making one attentive to the historical basis of Christianity, and interpreting Christian faith for a dialogue with contemporary philosophy. In other words, reason has discerning, descriptive, attentive, and apologetic use.

3. The Purpose of Paradox

As has been pointed out, Kierkegaard uses the word "paradox" abundantly throughout his writings. We can almost say that no writer has ever used this word so frequently as Kierkegaard. Why does he emphasize the paradox so much? The answer can be found in Kierkegaard's desire to "introduce Christianity into Christendom."¹ In his day Hegelian rationalism controlled the thinking of Christians. The consequence of this was that "Christendom has done away with Christianity, without being quite aware of it."² The Hegelian system is a monistic one which maintains the dialectical identity between thought and being, and even the divine and the human. Under the influence of Hegelianism, "the qualitative distinction between God and man is pantheistically abolished."³ In Kierkegaard's opinion, this is incompatible with the transcendence of God which is affirmed by Christianity. In Christendom the doctrine of sin is also negated because in Hegelian philosophy sin is only a necessary stage in the development of the finite spirit and is overcome when the finite spirit realizes its identity with the Absolute Spirit. By denying the transcendence of God and man's sin, Hegelian philosophy makes the doctrine of Incarnation unnecessary.

¹Training, p. 39.

²Ibid.

³Sickness, p. 248.

To Kierkegaard, all of this is precisely to reduce the paradoxical nature of Christianity into the pagan religion of immanence.

According to Kierkegaard, the fundamental error of Hegelian philosophy is that it overestimates the power of human reason. Kierkegaard does not deny the power of reason in the sphere of pure thought. But he insists that reason is impotent in the sphere of existence to which Christianity belongs. It is precisely through the invasion of reason into Christianity that Christian doctrine is distorted and passionate subjectivity is replaced by objective indifference. Thus, Kierkegaard's complaint is: "Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion;"¹ and therefore "the religious situation in our country is . . . Christianity does not exist."²

Since Christianity does not exist in Christendom, the task of Kierkegaard is to reintroduce Christianity. He does so by emphasizing the paradox of Christianity. For him, the purpose of the paradox is not to reject but to limit reason. The paradox is a sign which shows the limitation of reason. In his Journal Kierkegaard states:

The Absurd, the Paradox, is so constructed that the reason is by no means able of itself to resolve it into nonsense and show that it is nonsense. No, it is a sign, an enigma, a composite enigma, of which the reason must say, "I cannot

¹The Present Age, p. 33.

²The Last Years, p. 175.

solve it, it is not for me to understand it," but from this it does not follow that it is nonsense.¹

This quotation signifies that the paradox is a boundary-signal which warns reason not to go across the different territory. It is Kierkegaard's insistence that reason can never understand Christianity, for Christianity is beyond reason.

Kierkegaard strongly insists that "human reason has limits."²

For it is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are. Human understanding has vulgarly occupied itself with nothing but understanding, but if it would only take trouble to understand itself at the same time it would simply have to posit the paradox.³

This shows that the paradox is beyond the power of reason to conceive. In the Fragments Kierkegaard maintains that reason can conceive likeness. But reason cannot conceive an absolute unlikeness. Thus, God is "the Unknown" to reason, "for if the God is absolutely unlike man, then man is absolutely unlike the God; but how could the Reason be expected to understand this?"⁴ Moreover, reason is unable to know existence.

Thus I always reason from existence, not toward existence, whether I move in the sphere of

¹ Papier, X2 A354, cited in Howard A. Johnson (ed.), A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 186.

² Ibid.

³ Journals, no. 633.

⁴ Fragments, p. 58.

palpable sensible face or in the realm of thought. I do not for example prove that a stone exists, but some existing thing is a stone.¹

In the Postscript Kierkegaard attacks Hegel, for his exaggeration of reason and his distortion of Christianity. Again, Kierkegaard stresses the limits of reason. He states that "a logical system is possible," but "an existential system is impossible."² Existence is concrete which cannot be included in an abstract system of logic. He insists that existence and logic are not to be confused, for each has its own different spheres. Since Christianity does not belong to the sphere of logic, he points out that the aim of the Postscript is to "describe the other way (viz, away from the System, from speculation, &c., in order to become a Christian."³

Kierkegaard repeatedly declares that Christianity is a paradox. His intention is to limit reason within the realm of thought. In a sense, Kierkegaard's paradox is similar to Socratic ignorance, for the latter tries to separate what man can understand from what he cannot understand. Further, his paradox is a reminder of the Socratic motto: "Know thyself." But Kierkegaard claims that he "makes an advance upon Socrates,"⁴ for he teaches not only that man must recognize his inability to know the truth but also that he may obtain this knowledge from God, in His revelation.

¹Fragments, p. 50.

²Postscript, p. 99.

³Point of View, p. 42.

⁴Fragments, p. 50.

To sum up, Kierkegaard's emphasis on paradox is a protest against Hegelian rationalism which he believes exaggerates the power of reason and distorts the very essence of Christianity. The attempt of Kierkegaard is not to reject but to limit reason within its realm, namely the realm of thought. In doing so, as we shall see next, he tries to make room for faith.

4. Paradox and Faith

Kierkegaard affirms, "Christianity is precisely the paradoxical."¹ Now the question is: How do we come to understand Christianity which is paradoxical? What is our proper relation to paradox? Here Kierkegaard suggests to us a method of appropriation.

Now if Christianity is essentially something objective, it is necessary for the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake for the observer to be objective. In every case where the object of knowledge is the very inwardness of the subjectivity of the individual, it is necessary for the knower to be in a corresponding condition.²

This means that one must appropriate different subject-matters in different ways in accordance with their different natures. According to Kierkegaard, the truth of Christianity is subjectivity, hence it must be appropriated by the very inwardness of the subjectivity of the individual.

¹Postscript, p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 51.

We shall first discuss why pure objectivity of the rational method is unable to understand the paradox. If this method is impossible, we shall then discuss why subjectivity of faith is the only possible relation to the paradox.

1. Rejection of Objective Reason

In any scientific or objective account of the truth, the truth exists independently of the individual; hence subjectivity or the personal equation is the enemy to be feared. Kierkegaard does not deny the value of the objective search for the truth if it is limited to its own proper sphere. In fact, he says that mathematics and historical science are to be studied objectively and detachedly.

The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, becomes infinitely indifferent.¹

But Kierkegaard is more concerned with ethico-religious truth. He maintains that such a truth lies in personal or subjective appropriation. The emphasis is upon the "how" rather than upon the "what," for "the objective accent falls on What is said, the subjective accent on How it is said."²

Therefore, he emphatically opposes the application of objective method to existence. The movement of this method

¹Postscript, p. 171.

²Ibid., p. 181.

is away from the personal or existing subject and directed to abstract thought and objective reflection. If human life is completely governed by the requirements of such a method, the significance of man is liable to be reduced to nothing more than matter. Thus objective reflection makes the person accidental and indifferent. "The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing."¹

Kierkegaard realizes that objective method involves not only an overthrow of personal values but also a destruction of ethico-religious truth. He insists that it is impossible to prove the truth of Christianity either by historical inquiry or by philosophical reasoning. This is so because

the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is merely an approximation. And an approximation, when viewed as a basis for an eternal happiness, is wholly inadequate.²

The same criticism can also be applicable to philosophical reasoning, "because philosophy in its objectivity is wholly indifferent to his and my and your eternal happiness."³

Kierkegaard holds that human reason cannot understand the paradox, for the paradox is not a form of knowledge. "Christianity is not a matter of knowledge, so that the increased knowledge is of no avail."⁴ When the speculative

¹Postscript, p. 171.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Ibid., p. 53.

⁴Ibid., p. 192.

philosopher claims to comprehend the truth of Christianity, he does not really understand it. On the contrary, he simply "abrogates the paradox."¹ Hence there is no way from objective reason to the paradox.

ii. Admission of Subjective Faith

Christianity affirms that God has become a historical person in time. This is the paradox which reason cannot understand, for "no knowledge can have for its object the absurdity that the Eternal is the historical."² The basic error of the rational approach, according to Kierkegaard, lies in the fact that it approaches objectively something which is not objective.

Kierkegaard explicitly states that Christianity is subjectivity.

Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.³

Thus the truth of Christianity is subjective. Kierkegaard makes a sharp distinction between objective truth and subjective truth. Objective truth is accidental and indifferent to existence, whereas subjective truth is essential and is passionately interested in one's existence. In Either/Or

¹Ibid., p. 200.

²Fragments, p. 76.

³Postscript, p. 33.

he states, "Only the truth that edifies is the truth for thee."¹ In his Journal he writes, "The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."² This means that Christianity is inseparately related to personal existence.

If Christianity by its nature is subjectivity, it follows that Christianity must be appropriated subjectively. "The subjective acceptance is precisely the decisive factor; and an objective acceptance of Christianity . . . is paganism or thoughtlessness."³ The basic difference between Christianity and philosophy is that "philosophy teaches that the way is to become objective, while Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, i.e. to become a subject in truth."⁴ Thus Christianity protests against every form of objectivity and "wishes to intensify passion to its highest pitch; but passion is subjectivity, and does not exist objectively."⁵

To assert that God becomes man, the Eternal in time, is a paradox. This paradox cannot be comprehended by reason. But Kierkegaard insists that it can be approached and grasped by faith. In the Postscript he asserts:

¹Either/Or, II, . 356.

²Journals, no. 22.

³Postscript, p. 116.

⁴Ibid., p. 117.

⁵Ibid.

It [Christianity] has proclaimed itself as the Paradox, and it has required of the individual the inwardness of faith in relation to that which stamps itself as an offense to the Jews and a folly to the Greeks--and an absurdity to the understanding.¹

In the Fragments he states, "Faith is itself a miracle, and all that holds true of the Paradox also holds true of Faith."² In Training in Christianity he affirms that "the God-Man exists only for faith."³

Here we must note that the nature of faith, in Kierkegaard's opinion, is subjectivity. Faith is characterized by an "infinite personal interestedness" in its object--the God-man, the absolute paradox.⁴ As truth is subjectivity, so is faith. Kierkegaard's definition of truth is: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."⁵ The truth is a venture to choose an objective uncertainty with the passion of inwardness. This is precisely the expression of faith.

Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe.⁶

This means that faith is not based on an objective certainty.

¹Ibid., p. 191.

²Fragments, p. 81.

³Training, p. 122.

⁴Postscript, p. 30.

⁵Ibid., p. 182.

⁶Ibid.

In Kierkegaard's view, there is no objective certainty in any historical event, for it occurs from freedom rather than from necessity. Therefore, the historical is "the object of belief," while the logical is the object of knowledge.¹ Since the Incarnation is a historical event, it is the object of belief rather than knowledge. But the Incarnation is no ordinary but an unique historical event, and this makes it even more difficult for reason to understand it. Thus the paradox becomes the absurdity from the standpoint of pure reason.

Faith is further characterized by an act of will. "Belief is not a form of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will."² Faith is a decision of the self to accept the grace of God in Jesus Christ. "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."³ Faith is a recognition that God is the standard of truth with which man must comply. Thus in his Journal Kierkegaard writes:

The paradox in Christian truth is invariably due to the fact that it is truth as it exists for God. The standard of measure and the end is superhuman; and there is only one relationship possible: faith.⁴

In On Authority and Revelation he insists that men are to be tested by the paradox and not vice versa.

¹Fragments, p. 103.

²Ibid.,

³Sickness, p. 213.

⁴Journals, no. 1061.

The fact that the eternal once came into existence in time is not a something which has to be tested in time, not something which men are to test, but is the paradox by which men are to be tested.¹

These quotations point to a basic principle of Kierkegaard, namely that the subject must conform to the object and not vice versa. In other words, the human mind must conform to God's revelation in Christ, and not the other way around. In Kierkegaard's view, the error of the speculative philosopher is precisely that he does not accept revelation as it is presented; instead revelation is put into the test of reason. There is no wonder that the paradox is a scandal or offense to reason. But Kierkegaard insists that the paradox does not offend the believer, for "when the believer believes, the Absurd is not the Absurd--faith transforms it."² Thus, "true faith breathes healthily and blissfully in the Absurd."³

To sum up, Kierkegaard insists that the paradox is the object of faith rather than the object of knowledge. Christianity is essentially subjectivity; hence it requires a subjective appropriation. For Kierkegaard, the pure

¹On Authority and Revelation, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 58. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Authority.

²Papier, X6 B79, cited in H. A. Johnson (ed.), A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 182.

³Ibid., cited in Johnson (ed.), A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 183.

objective method of reason is unable to apprehend the meaning of paradox. For Kierkegaard, paradox exists only for faith.

5. Summary

The characteristics of Kierkegaard's paradox are as follows. (1) Paradox is a category or concept referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities. (2) Paradox is absolute rather than relative. (3) Paradox is beyond the comprehension of reason in the sense of traditional logic. (4) Paradox is the object of faith rather than the object of reason.

The purpose of Kierkegaard's paradox is to protest against Hegelian rationalism which he believes exaggerates the power of reason and thus distorts the very essence of Christianity. The attempt of Kierkegaard is not to reject but to limit reason within the realm of thought. In doing so, he tries to make room for faith.

In the next chapter, we shall investigate the role of Kierkegaard's paradox in his theology and deal with his paradoxes.

CHAPTER V

PARADOX AND KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGY

As we have pointed out before, for Kierkegaard, Christianity is paradoxical and thus belongs to the sphere of subjectivity or faith. But does this mean that he subsequently does nothing but only believes in Christianity deeply and intensely? Since he holds that Christian faith is beyond the comprehension of reason, does this imply that he rejects reason altogether?

Here we must say that Kierkegaard does use reason to justify his view that Christian faith is beyond the comprehension of reason. Thus, he affirms, "So the believing Christian not only possesses but uses his understanding, respects the universal-human . . . to make sure that he believes against the understanding."¹ Kierkegaard does not simply believe in Christianity. He goes further to talk about subjective faith in objective, articulated language. In other words, he has developed a theology by utilizing objective reason.

Now since faith, in Kierkegaard's view, belongs to the sphere of existence and subjectivity, and theology, language about faith, belongs to the sphere of thought and objectivity, this reveals that there is a gap between subjective faith and

¹Postscript, p. 504.

objective theology. But Kierkegaard believes that the gap can be and must be bridged by bringing thought into existence. In other words, he insists that thought must be rooted in existence. He states, "Spiritually speaking, a man's thought must be the building in which he lives--otherwise, everything is topsy-turvy."¹ This shows that, for Kierkegaard, theology is possible and valuable insofar as it is grounded in subjective faith.

However, Kierkegaard has no patience with abstract, pure thought which has nothing to do with existence. Purely objective knowledge may be very clear and precise. It tells us what something is, but by itself it is never sure about existence. For this reason, Kierkegaard attacks Hegelian philosophy as inadequate. In his opinion, Hegelian philosophy leaves out the important factors of existence and subjectivity. All Hegelians, says Kierkegaard,

are agreed in placing evil in isolated subjectivity --objectivity being the saving factor. Oh depths of confusion! No--the whole concept of objectivity which has been made into our salvation is merely the food of sickness.²

He continues:

In relation to their systems, most systematisers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack close by; they do not live in their own enormous systematic buildings.³

¹Journals, no. 583.

²Ibid., no. 104.

³Ibid., no. 583.

It is Kierkegaard's contention that language about faith must correspond to human existence and subjectivity; otherwise, it is empty and useless. For this reason, language about faith is not to communicate results as much as it is to arouse human passion and subjectivity and to stimulate the process of becoming Christian.

Having discussed the possibility of theology, we shall now examine Kierkegaard's theology in order to understand the role of paradox in his theology. He states, "Christianity is precisely paradoxical,"¹ and "once for all the paradox, and paradox at every point."² In this chapter, we shall show that God, Christ, man, sin, and religiousness B are paradoxes in Kierkegaard's theology.

1. God

That, in Kierkegaard's theology, God is the Wholly Other is well known by his readers. Yet few readers recognize that he does affirm the immanence of God. We shall show that the transcendence of God is not the whole of his view of God. For him, God is both transcendent and immanent. This, as we shall see, is a paradox.

1. The Transcendence of God

¹Postscript, p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 194.

That there is a qualitative difference between God and man is a well-known thesis of Kierkegaard. In the Postscript he asserts that there is an "absolute difference between God and man."¹ In the Fragments he states that "the God is absolutely unlike man."² In the Sickness he affirms, "God and man are two qualities between which there is an infinite qualitative difference."³ In the Training he asserts, "There is an endless yawning difference between God and man."⁴

The above quotations clearly reveal the transcendent view of God in Kierkegaard's thought. But what is the reason for the absolute difference between God and man? The answer of Kierkegaard is: "Aye, what can it be but sin; since the unlikeness, the absolute unlikeness, is something that man has brought upon himself."⁵ The difference lies in the fact that man is in a state of sin and God is not. It is human sin that man has deliberately cut off his relation with God in an act of self independence.

If the God and man are absolutely different, this cannot be accounted for on the basis of what man derives from the God, for in so far they are akin. Their unlikeness must therefore be explained by what man derives from himself, or by what he has brought upon his own head.⁶

¹Postscript, p. 195.

²Fragments, p. 58.

³Sickness, p. 259.

⁴Training, p. 67.

⁵Fragments, p. 58.

⁶Ibid.

It is sin which creates the gulf between God and man. Further, it is sin which corrupts the human ability to know God. Man is "in Error by reason of his own guilt."¹

It must be noted that the transcendent view of God is merely one side of Kierkegaard's thought. His strong emphasis upon the infinite qualitative difference between God and man, has a corrective aim to the Hegelian synthesis of God and man. It is also a corrective to romantic pantheism, for the romantic gives a purely immanentist interpretation of the relation between God and man. In other words, in the romantic view, God's eternal being is identified with the vital forces and temporal sweep of nature. But as James Collins states:

For Kierkegaard, this tampering with the divine transcendence does not make God more intimate to us but only obscures His distinctive way of being and reduces His providential freedom to spontaneous ratification of whatever does occur.²

Moreover, as H. R. Mackintosh has pointed out, Kierkegaard's emphasis on the transcendence of God is a corrective to anthropomorphism.

Kierkegaard's vigorous denial that the character of God can be simply read off from human nature is both sound and opportune. His solemn emphasis on the majestic transcendence of the Deity corrects and refutes all feeble anthropomorphism.³

¹Fragments, p. 19.

²James Collins, God in Modern Philosophy, p. 343.

³H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, p. 241.

ii. The Immanence of God

Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the transcendence of God does not mean that he denies the active relationship between God and man. In fact, he states:

Remember that here is One who is in heaven--and thou art upon earth. But do not imagine that in His exaltation He is far away: herein lies the seriousness and responsibility of the situation, that He, the infinitely exalted, is quite close to thee, closer than the men who are about thee daily, closer than any most trusted friend before whom thou dost feel free to show thyself for what thou art.¹

This quotation is a clear indication that God is infinitely exalted, and yet He is quite close to every man. The immanence of God is further indicated in one of Kierkegaard's basic categories, namely that the individual exists "before God."²

Kierkegaard's view of God is not the "unmoved Mover" of Aristotle. The Aristotelian God is a pure thinking or contemplative being. God, being immaterial, cannot perform any bodily action. His activity must be purely spiritual, and so intellectual. In other words, God's activity is one of thought. But what is the object of His thought? God's object must be the best of all possible objects, and in any case the knowledge enjoyed by God cannot be knowledge that involves change or sensation or novelty.

¹Christian Discourse, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 174.

²Sickness, p. 214.

It ~~The~~ divine thought¹ thinks of that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement.¹

God, therefore, knows Himself in an eternal act of intuition or self-consciousness. In other words, "it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking."² God is subsistent thought, which eternally thinks itself.

Moreover, Aristotle insists that God cannot have any object of thought outside Himself, for that would mean that He had an end outside Himself. God, therefore, knows only Himself. Thomas Aquinas tries to interpret Aristotle in such a way as not to exclude knowledge of the world and the exercise of divine providence, for he considers that all things other than God owe their being entirely to God, so that God's self-knowledge must be at the same time a knowledge of all other things. This is a possible and a fruitful line of thought; but it is not that which Aristotle actually adopts. For Aristotle, that God should know Himself, and that He should know others, are two alternatives, for he states, "What does it think of? Either of itself or of something else."³ In affirming the first alternative, he implicitly denies the second. He denies to God all knowledge of evil,

¹Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1074b26.

²*Ibid.*, 1074b34.

³*Ibid.*, 1074b22.

and all transition from one object of thought to another. The result of this is an exclusion from the divine life of any relation to others but itself.

Thus there is no such thing, in Aristotle's view, as the divine providence or revelation which is so important an aspect of Kierkegaard's thought. God, according to Aristotle, does not care about and provide for man. He does not even create the universe, for the latter is eternal. It is true that God causes its motion, but only in the way a beautiful picture might cause a man to try to purchase it. God is the object of desire for the lesser intelligences, but He is unconscious of their desire and admiration and would be indifferent to them if He were aware of them. For Aristotle, God is a metaphysical necessity, for the system requires an unmoved mover, a completely actual and fully realized form, but He is not an object of religious worship.

In contrast, Kierkegaard's view of God emphasizes providence and revelation.

Moved by love, the God is thus eternally resolved to reveal himself. But as love is the motive so love must also be the end; for it would be a contradiction for the God to have motive and an end which did not correspond. His love is a love of the learner, and his aim is to win him.¹

Kierkegaard illustrates God's revelation by a parable of a king falling in love with a humble maiden.

¹Fragments, p. 30.

Then let the harp be tuned, let the songs of the poets begin to sound, and let all be festive while love celebrates its triumph. For love is exultant when it unites equals, but it is triumphant when it makes that which was unequal equal in love.¹

But since the union cannot be brought about by elevating the humble one, it can only come by "a descent" of the king, who comes "in the form of a servant."² Here Kierkegaard is speaking of the immanence of God, for He becomes man by His infinite love. It is this love which bridges the gulf between God and man.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard holds that the immutability of God is not an indifference but a heartfelt concern for man's welfare.

Yet this immutability is not that icy indifference, that destructive elevation, that ambiguous aloofness, which the hardened understanding eulogized; on the contrary, this immutability is heartfelt and warm and omnipresent, an immutability that concerns itself about a man's welfare.³

This shows that Kierkegaard's view of God is transcendent, and yet related to man. As James Collins puts it:

The Incarnation respects the proper reality of both eternity and temporal existence, transcendence and immanence. Yet it also removes from the absolute its aloofness and impersonality, and from the finite its incapacity to present man with the substance of enduring happiness.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 39.

³Edifying Discourses, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946), IV, p. 184.

⁴James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, p. 165.

Kierkegaard's criticism of the traditional proofs of the existence of God further gives us indication that there is an immanent view of God in Kierkegaard's thought. According to Kierkegaard, reason has a supreme passion to discover something that thought cannot think, namely, "the Unknown," which he also calls "the God."¹ After Kant's fashion, Kierkegaard argues that the ontological proof fails to make a distinction between ideal being and existential being.

Kierkegaard argues that in beginning a proof of the existence of God one must presuppose it not as doubtful, but as certain. "For if the God does not exist it would of course be impossible to prove it; and if he does exist it would be folly to attempt it."² Thus the proof does not prove anything existentiāl, but merely develops the content of a conception. This tells us that unless we start from premises in which God's reality is perceived to be already present, we cannot arrive at God's existence at the conclusion. In other words, God's existence must be given rather than proven. Therefore, Kierkegaard asserts:

Thus I always reason from existence, not toward existence, whether I move in the sphere of palpable sensible fact or in the realm of thought. I do not for example prove that a stone exists, but that some existing thing is a stone.³

Another criticism of the ontological proof is that it

¹Fragments, p. 49.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 50.

is impossible for the existence of God to emerge in the conclusion without a leap.

As long as I keep my hold on the proof, i.e., continue to demonstrate, the existence does not come out, if for no other reason than that I am engaged in proving it; but when I let the proof go, the existence is there. But this act of letting go is surely also something; it is indeed a contribution of mine. Must not this also be taken into the account, this little movement, brief as it may be--it need not be long, for it is a leap.¹

In other words, in order to arrive at the conclusion that God exists, a leap over a gap between the last stage of the argument and the result is necessary. Hence the philosopher must "let the proof go" and make a leap to the conclusion. In this sense, any philosophical demonstration of the existence of God is bound to be inconclusive, since His existence never emerges with such certainty that reason is finally satisfied and needs no further arguments.

Although Kierkegaard discusses the ontological argument, he adds little to Kant's criticisms of it. Kierkegaard's criticism of the cosmological argument, however, differs somewhat from that of Kant. According to Kierkegaard, it is impossible to pass from known effects to the existence of the unknown cause of them. He gives us an example:

If it were proposed to prove Napoleon's existence from Napoleon's deeds, would it not be a most curious proceeding? His existence does indeed explain his deeds, but the deeds do not prove

¹Ibid., p. 53.

his existence, unless I have already understood the word "his" so as thereby to have assumed his existence.¹

Since there is no absolute relationship between Napoleon and his deeds, "I cannot pass from the deeds to existence."² It might be thought that the argument for Napoleon's existence fails because there is the element of contingency involved here. That is to say that Napoleon need not have been the author of these deeds and they could have been done by someone else. If this is so, where we fail with Napoleon we are bound to succeed with God, because there can be no contingency in Him. There is an absolute relationship between God and His works. "The works of God are such that only the God can perform them."³

According to Kierkegaard, this supposition, however, is of no use.

From what works then do I propose to derive the proof? From the works as apprehended through an ideal interpretation, i.e., such as they do not immediately reveal themselves. But in that case it is not from the works that I make the proof; I merely develop the ideality I have presupposed, and because of my confidence in this I make so bold as to defy all objections, even those that have not yet been made.⁴

This shows that the cosmological argument is fallacious. The point of Kierkegaard is that the existence of God cannot be inferred from His works in the world without running the

¹Ibid., p. 50.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 51-52.

⁴Ibid., p. 52.

risk that something terrible may happen which would overthrow the proof.¹ For the cosmological argument is based upon a selection of the evidence which emphasizes the favorable and neglects the unfavorable facts. Like the ontological argument, Kierkegaard maintains that the cosmological argument cannot succeed without presupposing the existence of God from the beginning.

The implication of Kierkegaard's criticism of the traditional proofs of the existence of God is that if God can no longer be understood as an object to be reached through demonstration, He must be reached in existential encounter. If God can be reached in existential encounter, He is not the Wholly Other. Here we find an immanent view of God in Kierkegaard's thought.

In an entry in his Journal for the year 1849, Kierkegaard writes "the law of the relationship between God and man in the God-relationship" as follows:

Divisio

There is an endless yawning qualitative difference between God and man.
This signifies, or the expression for it is: A man can do nothing at all, it is God that gives all, it is He that bestows upon man faith, &c.
This is grace, and here lies Christianity's first.²

Yet Kierkegaard does not think that Divisio is the whole

¹Ibid.

²Papier, IX A 411, quoted in Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, I, p. 9.

thing. Hence he immediately continues to declare:

Notwithstanding the fact that of course nothing, no work of any sort, any more than the act of faith, can have anything meritorious about it (for in such a case the divisio or the principal clause is abolished and we are here dependent upon a subordinate clause)--nevertheless it holds good that we should dare to approach God with childlike confidence.

We must particularly pay attention to the following sentences which immediately follow from the above quotation.

If the divisio is the whole thing, then God becomes so endlessly exalted that there is absolutely no real relationship at all between God and the individual man. Therefore one must pay such careful heed to the subdivisio, without which the life of the individual acquires no élan.¹

This shows that God is both transcendent and immanent. Both aspects of God are affirmed by Kierkegaard.

Here if God is both transcendent and immanent, He is a paradox. For Kierkegaard, paradox is a category referring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities. He insists that God is transcendent, for He is absolutely, qualitatively different from man. If God and man are absolutely, qualitatively different beings, it is impossible that there is any relationship between them. But Kierkegaard also maintains that God is immanent, for He becomes a particular man in history, and has an active

¹Ibid.

relationship with man. Thus, for Kierkegaard, God is far and yet near at hand, unrelated and yet related to man, eternal and yet in time; He is immutable and yet becomes a man.

This shows that God's transcendence and immanence are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between God's transcendence and immanence that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between God's transcendence and immanence is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of God is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, God's transcendence and immanence are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of God is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of God belongs to the sphere of faith.

2. Christology

1. Incarnation

Kierkegaard refers to the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as "the absolute paradox." He states, "That God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox sensu strictissimo, the absolute paradox."¹ As James Collins puts it:

The Incarnation means that the eternal has subjected itself to the law of becoming, that the All-Holy has taken upon itself the conditions of sinful existence, that God has become Man.²

The Incarnation is no ordinary event, but an unique event. It is something which could not happen, and yet it did happen. According to speculative philosophy, eternity and time are mutually incompatible. But, now, "the eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox."³ This is the supreme paradox of Christianity. In D. M. Baillie's words, the Incarnation is "the central paradox" or "the climax of all the Christian paradoxes;"⁴ and in E. J. Carnell's words, it is "the paradox of paradoxes."⁵

¹Postscript, p. 194.

²James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, p. 162.

³Postscript, p. 187.

⁴D. M. Baillie, God Was In Christ, p. 110.

⁵E. J. Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard, p. 83.

The Incarnation is the absolute paradox. Kierkegaard distinguishes the absolute paradox from the relative one.

A relative paradox relates itself to the relative difference between more or less cleverness and brains; but the absolute paradox, just because it is absolute, can be relevant only to the absolute difference that distinguishes man from God, and has nothing to do with the relative wrangling between man and man with respect to the fact that one man has a little more brains than another.¹

Thus the absolute paradox lies in the absolute difference between God and man, whereas the relative paradox lies in the relative difference between men.

Jesus Christ is the God-man, the absolute paradox. According to Kierkegaard, in the Incarnation God becomes true man. God appears "in the form of a servant. But this servant-form is no mere outer garment, like the king's beggar-cloak..... It is his true form and figure."² The absolute paradox lies in the fact that God becomes a particular man like us.

The coming of Christ is and remains a paradox. To his contemporaries the paradox lay in the fact that he, this particular individual man who looked like other men, spoke like them, followed their habits and customs, was the son of God.³

Here Kierkegaard is obviously in opposition to docetism, which would deny Christ's true humanity. Kierkegaard

¹ Postscript, p. 195.

² Fragments, p. 39.

³ Journals, no. 417.

insists that "the God's servant-form, however is not a mere disguise, but is actual; it is not a parastatic body but an actual body."¹ Moreover, the divinity of Christ is never questioned by Kierkegaard. He would not accept kenosis, the idea that Christ totally empties Himself of His divinity, for he affirms, "At all times, Christ is as much God as man-- just as in the sea the reflection of the sky retains the depth of the celestial vault."²

Kierkegaard's view is a reaction against both Ebionitism and Gnosticism.

The error with regard to the God-Man took one or another of two forms: either that of eliminating the qualification God (Ebionitism), or that of eliminating the qualification man (Gnosticism).³

Therefore, Eduard Geismar asserts:

It is an indubitable fact that Kierkegaard presents the Christian faith in the person of Jesus Christ as true man and true God, in full conformity with the orthodox Athanasian creed.⁴

It must be noted that Kierkegaard stresses that the Incarnation of God in Christ is in a particular man rather than an abstract man or man in general. "The paradox consists principally in the fact that God, the Eternal, came into

¹ Fragments, p. 68.

² Papier, II A 595, quoted in Louis Dupre, Kierkegaard as Theologian (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 148.

³ Training, p. 122.

⁴ Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, p. 63.

existence in time as a particular man."¹ This is not a metaphysical unity of God and man as such. Kierkegaard criticizes Hegelians for ignoring this point.

By force of lecturing they have transformed the God-Man into the speculative unity of God and man sub specie aeterni, manifested, that is to say, in the nullipresent medium of pure being, whereas in truth the God-Man is the unity of God and an individual man in an actual historical situation.²

Here Kierkegaard is emphasizing the humanity of Christ as a concrete reality of flesh and blood. This is what constitutes the absolute paradox, that the infinite God should appear in the form of a particular man. Therefore, he asserts, "The God-Man is not the unity of God and mankind. Such terminology exhibits the profundity of optical illusion. The God-Man is the unity of God and an individual man."³

A distinction between the absolute paradox and the Socratic paradox must also be made, for, according to Kierkegaard, the Socratic paradox occurs as a preparation for the absolute paradox. Like Christianity, Socrates' view is in opposition to objective speculation. "The infinite merit of the Socratic position was precisely to accentuate the fact that the knower is an existing individual, and that the task of existing is his essential task."⁴ Socrates is the first philosopher who realizes that every knower is primarily

¹ Postscript, p. 528.

² Training, p. 123.

³ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴ Postscript, p. 185.

an existing individual and that truth is primarily subjective. It is only from the subjectivity or inwardness of the existing individual that one comes into relationship with the essential truth.

When subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that the subjectivity is the truth.¹

This means that the essential truth is arrived at by means of personal decision rather than by means of objective speculation. Thus the truth, objectively, becomes a paradox because it is not reached by objective thinking.

Both Socrates and Plato assume that the man in search of truth must already have a relationship to the truth, for otherwise he could not seek it. Both men apply the principle of recollection, but differently. "Socrates concentrates essentially upon accentuating existence, while Plato forgets this and loses himself in speculation."² Through recollection Plato attempts to speculate on the eternal truth, whereas Socrates realizes that he can know nothing positive about the eternal truth. For Socrates, the eternal truth is of "objective uncertainty."³ As Hermann Diem puts it:

He [Socrates] knows only that there lies truth at the foundation of all but what this truth is he does not know. Hence he renounces all attempt

¹Ibid., p. 183.

²Ibid., p. 184.

³Ibid., p. 183.

to establish what absolute being is and rather makes his life a movement orientated towards absolute being.¹

It is the Socratic ignorance that affirms the objective uncertainty of God. But Kierkegaard goes further. Here lies the difference between Socrates and Kierkegaard.

When Socrates believed that there was a God, he held fast to the objective uncertainty with the whole passion of his inwardness, and it is precisely in this contradiction and in this risk, that faith is rooted. Now it is otherwise. Instead of objective uncertainty, there is here a certainty, namely, that objectively it is absurd; and this absurdity, held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith.²

Here Kierkegaard insists that the object of faith is objectively an absurdity rather than objectively uncertainty. The Socratic paradox lies in an objective uncertainty, whereas Kierkegaard's paradox lies in an objective absurdity.

The absurd is--that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals.³

In short, the Incarnation is a paradox or "the absolute paradox" in Kierkegaard's words. The paradox lies in the fact that God and a particular man are united in Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard holds that God and man are absolutely, qualitatively different. In other words, God and man are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between

¹Hermann Diem, Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence, p. 47.

²Postscript, p. 188.

³Ibid.

God and a particular man in Christ that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between God and man is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of the Incarnation is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, God and a particular man are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason, the paradox of the Incarnation is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since he insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of the Incarnation belongs to the sphere of faith.

ii. Exaltation and Lowliness

The paradox of Christ can also be viewed from the fact that he is both exalted and lowly. This is stated clearly in Kierkegaard's statement: "Christ is composite, though one and the same, He is the humbled one and the exalted."¹

In the Fragments Kierkegaard describes God as a king, the exalted one,² who becomes not only a man but a servant, the humblest.

In order that the union may be brought about, God must therefore become the equal of man, and so He will appear in the likeness of the humblest. But the humblest is one who must serve others, and God will therefore appear in the form of a servant.³

¹Training, p. 160.

²Fragments, p. 32.

³Ibid., p. 39.

The paradox of Christ consists in the fact that he, the king, comes in the lowly form of a servant rather than in glory.

As a servant, Christ endures all kinds of suffering.

But the servant-form is no mere outer garment, and therefore the God must suffer all things, endure all things, make experience of all things. He must suffer hunger in the desert, he must thirst in the time of his agony, he must be forsaken in death, absolutely like the humblest --behold the man!¹

Kierkegaard affirms that Christ's humiliation is undertaken by Christ with his willingness. "Christ humbled himself-- not: was humbled."² This shows that Christ is different from others, for he "must unconditionally give his consent and approbation to every humiliation he suffers, his willingness to submit to the humiliation."³ The motivation of his humiliation is his infinite love, the kingly love for "the humble maiden."⁴

In the Fragments the paradox of Christ is described as the exalted one who becomes the humblest. But in the Training the paradox of Christ is described as a lowly man claiming to be God. According to Kierkegaard, the life of Jesus is not extraordinary. Jesus is "a lowly man, born of a despised virgin, his father a carpenter."⁵ "The company he keeps is

¹Ibid., p. 40.

²Journals, no. 1020.

³Ibid.

⁴Fragments, p. 32.

⁵Training, p. 44.

the lowest class of the population, including, furthermore, sinners and tax-gatherers."¹ "He is a man despised as a seducer, blasphemer!" and "His Apostles are a bunch of fishermen."² The paradox of Christ lies in the fact that this lowly Jesus claims himself to be God. "Immediately He is an individual man, just like other men, a lowly, insignificant man; but the contradiction is that He is God."³ This self-proclamation of Jesus is not different from that of "a madman," and hence is considered as a blasphemy to His whole generation."⁴

The lowliness of Jesus leads Kierkegaard to affirm that the humanity of Jesus is not a direct revelation of God. Jesus is God incognito who dwells among men and they know him not. "And so unrecognizableness, the absolute unrecognizableness, is this: being God, to be also an individual man."⁵ Thus, the contemporaries of Jesus do not recognize him as God, for

the true God cannot become directly recognizable; but direct recognizableness is what the merely human, what the men to whom He came,, would pray and implore of Him as the greatest alleviation.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 57.

²Ibid., p. 58.

³Ibid., p. 125.

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

⁵Ibid., p. 127.

⁶Ibid., p. 137.

"He was unrecognizable, so that it was not flesh and blood, but the exact opposite of flesh and blood, which prompted Peter to recognize Him."¹ In Point of View Kierkegaard further affirms:

The whole life of Christ on earth would have been mere play if He had been incognito to such a degree that He went through life totally unnoticed--and yet in a true sense He was incognito.²

In short, Jesus Christ is a paradox, for he is both exalted and lowly. Kierkegaard insists that Christ is exalted, for he is the king of glory. But he also maintains that Jesus is lowly, for he is a humble servant enduring all kinds of suffering. This shows that the exalted and the lowly are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between the exalted and the lowly in Jesus Christ that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between Christ's exaltation and lowliness is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of Christ is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, Christ's exaltation and lowliness are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of Christ is beyond the comprehension of

¹Ibid., p. 128.

²Point of View, p. 16.

reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of Christ must be accepted by faith.

3. Anthropology

According to Kierkegaard, man is both limited and free, and both temporal and eternal. This, as we shall see, is a paradox.

1. Necessity and Freedom

In Kierkegaard's view, man is composed of three dimensions: body, soul, and spirit. "Man is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily. But a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor. This third factor is the spirit."¹ Kierkegaard does not indicate the source of this trichotomic theory of man. Perhaps this is based on Paul's teaching in I Thessalonians 5: 23: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹Dread, p. 39.

However, in a real sense, Kierkegaard's view of man can be stated as a dichotomy rather than a trichotomy. The dichotomy lies in the fact that man ~~as~~ spirit is over against man as body and soul, for the former is of freedom and the latter is not. Let us now examine what Kierkegaard means by body, soul, and spirit.

Kierkegaard writes little about the human body. This may mean that he accepts the common view of the body. Man as body refers to his material organism which is the vehicle of the soul and is in an interactive relation with the soul. But man is more than body, for he is more than material things.

Man is more than body, for he has soul. For Kierkegaard, ~~soul refers to the~~ animating faculty which is known as free association or instinct conduct. Man as soul is at the same level with the animal kingdom, for both have soul. However, animals act only by instinct or necessity, and there is no moral choice in their action. Here lies the difference between man and animal. Man is spirit, for he has conscience. "It is really the conscience which constitutes a personality. Personality is an individual decision, substantiated by being known to God in the possibility of the conscience."¹ In other words, man is more than animal, for man has moral choice or conscience. "If at any time of his life he was

¹Journals, no. 560.

merely an animal, he never should become a man."¹

The uniqueness of man is that he is spirit. The spirit serves to relate soul and body by synthesis, for "a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor. This third factor is the spirit."² The essence of spirit is freedom. Human freedom is expressed in two ways: firstly, in moral choice or conscience, and secondly, in self-transcendence.

Kierkegaard insists that man is an ethical being. "It is really the conscience which constitutes a personality. Personality is an individual decision, substantiated by being known to God in the possibility of the conscience."³ It is the spiritual dimension of man which elevates man above animal. Edward John Carnell asserts, "If body and soul go far in explaining the descriptive essence of man, spirit goes far in explaining the imperative essence."⁴

Moreover, the human spirit is expressed in his self-transcendence. Kierkegaard states, "Spirituality is: the power of a man's understanding over his life."⁵ The self "relates itself to itself, which means freedom."⁶ This ability of self-transcendence, self-reflection, shows the

¹Dread, p. 39.

²Ibid.

³Journals, no. 560.

⁴E. J. Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 46-47.

⁵Journals, no. 1177.

⁶Sickness, p. 162.

spiritual dimension of man.

In short, man is a paradox, for he is both free and limited. Kierkegaard holds that man is free, for he is a spiritual being. But he also maintains that man is limited, for his body and soul have no moral choice. This shows that freedom and necessity are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between freedom and necessity in man that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between freedom and necessity is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of man is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, human freedom and limitedness are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of man is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of man belongs to the sphere of faith.

ii. The Temporal and the Eternal

Kierkegaard describes man as having two syntheses in himself. "Man was said to be a synthesis of soul and body; but he is at the same time a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal."¹ The difference between these two syntheses is stated as follows:

As for the latter synthesis, it evidently is not fashioned in the same way as the former. In the former case the two factors were soul and body, and the spirit was a third term, but was a third term in such a sense that there could not properly be any question of a synthesis until the spirit was posited. The other synthesis has only two factors: the temporal and the eternal. Where is the third term? And if there be no third term, there is really no synthesis; for a synthesis of that which is contradiction cannot be completed as a synthesis without a third term, for the recognition that the synthesis is a contradiction is precisely the assertion that it is not a synthesis.²

Here, in the first instance, it seems that Kierkegaard is describing the human condition, namely that man is both free and limited; he is free in spirit and yet he is limited in body and soul. In the second instance, it seems that he is speaking of ~~the human task~~, namely that man has a task to unite eternity in time. But this task is based on the condition of man. In other words, the human condition provides the possibility for the actualization of his task. Thus Kierkegaard writes:

¹Dread, p. 76.

²Ibid.

The synthesis of the eternal and the temporal is not a second synthesis but is the expression for the first synthesis in consequence of which man is a synthesis of soul and body sustained by spirit.¹

According to Kierkegaard, by nature man is body and soul; hence he is temporal and finite. In this sense, man is not different from animal. The uniqueness of man lies in the fact that he is spirit. "But what is spirit? Spirit is the self."² Thus the task of man is to become spirit or self. This does not mean that man is only body and soul before becoming spirit or self. In fact spirit is always present in man but in a kind of dreaming state.

Innocence is ignorance. In his innocence man is not determined as spirit but is soulishly determined in immediate unity with his natural condition. Spirit is dreaming in man.³

Becoming spirit or self is the task of man. He can either accept or reject it. In rejecting the task man becomes merely a beast. To become self, one must accept this task. What is the task?

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God.⁴

This means that man wills to be himself, accepting himself as a mixture of finite and infinite; he also wills to be

¹Ibid., p. 79.

²Sickness, p. 146.

³Dread, p. 37.

⁴Sickness, p. 162.

what God has ordained in His creation, and thus he is in relationship to God. By relating himself to himself and thus to God, one becomes spirit or self. When one becomes self, he "is grounded transparently in God."¹

Kierkegaard maintains that to become self is the task of man. To become self means to actualize the spiritual aspect of man. In other words, everyone has a personal responsibility to mediate the eternal in time. By the eternal Kierkegaard means human spirit. For him, spirit is the eternal aspect of man. Furthermore, Kierkegaard holds that the task of becoming self is based upon the decision of man's free will. "The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will the more self."²

According to Kierkegaard, man is not a static being, but is in process of becoming. This means that the task of man is never finished. Man has a constant task to mediate the eternal in time. The existence of the individual is a constant striving. "Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore a constant striving."³ This is also expressed in the language of Plato's myth of the charioteer: "Eternity is the winged horse, infinitely fast, and time is a worn-out jade; the existing individual is the driver."⁴

¹Sickness, p. 163.

²Ibid., p. 162.

³Postscript, p. 85.

⁴Ibid., p. 276.

In short, here man is viewed from a different standpoint by Kierkegaard. Man is both eternal and temporal, and this is a paradox. According to Kierkegaard, man is eternal, for he is spirit or self. But he also maintains that man is temporal, for he is body and soul. The eternal and the temporal are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between the eternal and the temporal in man that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between the eternal and the temporal is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of man is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, the eternal and the temporal are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of man is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of man belongs to the sphere of faith.

4. Sin

1. Original Sin

Although Kierkegaard accepts the Christian dogma of original sin, he gives it his own peculiar interpretation.

According to the traditional view,

the difference between Adam's first sin and the first sin of every man is this: Adam's sin conditions sinfulness as a consequence; the other first sin assumes sinfulness as a condition.¹

In other words, the traditional view affirms that man's sin is the result of Adam's sin. Kierkegaard cannot agree with this view, for it fails to see that sin is not purely determined but is primarily a free act. He argues that sin comes into every man's life exactly as it did in the case of Adam. Sin is originated by a leap or free act. Hence every sin is an original sin. "With the first sin came sin into the world. Exactly in the same way is this true of every subsequent first sin of man, that with it sin comes into the world."² Therefore, there is no justification for making Adam's sin greater than the sin of every man.³

Before the Fall, in Kierkegaard's view, man is in a state of innocence, not knowing good from evil. In this state man is indeed constituted of soul and body but is not yet spirit. It is dread which provides the condition for

¹Dread, p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Ibid.

spiritual realization. The distinction between man and beast is that dread is found in man but not in beast, for "dread is freedom's reality as possibility for possibility."¹ Yet it must be noted that dread does not necessarily cause sin. Dread is the precondition of sin, but it does not necessarily lead to sin, for sin always involves a free act.

Kierkegaard insists that there is no gradual change from innocence to sin. Such a view "paints a fantastic picture of how man was before the Fall, and gradually, as the understanding chatters about it, the assumed innocence becomes little by little, in the course of the twaddle, sinfulness --and so there it is."² Kierkegaard's view is that "sin came into the world by a sin. if this were not so, then sin would have come in as something accidental, which man would do well not to try to explain."³ This means that sin is not caused by good, nor is it brought about by a mere accident. Nothing but sin can cause sin. In other words, "sin presupposes itself."⁴ Thus sin comes to Adam precisely by his first sin, and it "comes in as the sudden, i.e. with the leap."⁵ Like freedom, sin presupposes itself and cannot be explained by any antecedent.⁶ When sin occurs there is a radical change. In this respect, all men share the experience

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 29.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.,

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 100.

of sin which Adam has.

Now what is the paradoxical nature of original sin? The clearest statement of this is found in Kierkegaard's Journal. He writes:

'Original sin' is guilt

that is the real paradox. How paradoxical that is may best be seen thus. It is formed by compounding qualitatively different categories. To 'inherit' is a natural category; 'guilt' is an ethical and spiritual category. Now who would ever think, says reason, of putting them together, of saying that something is inherited which by definition cannot be inherited.

It must be believed. The paradox in Christian truth is invariably due to the fact that it is truth as it exists for God. The standard of measure and the end is superhuman; and there is only one relationship possible: faith.¹

In this passage Kierkegaard tells us that even though Adam does not cause every man's sin; yet there is a kind of of inherited sin. It is not guilt which is inherited because each man can be responsible only for his own deeds. What is inherited from Adam is dread, spirit, sexuality, knowledge of good and evil. Thus the inheritance of sin refers essentially to the continuity of the race, for every man is an Adam, and is both an individual and a part of the race.² The paradox of sin lies in the fact that the precondition of sin is transmitted and yet sin is always a free act. Here the paradox is constituted by the combination of the ethico-spiritual with the biological.

¹Journals, no. 1061.

²Dread, p. 26.

The peculiarity of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the doctrine of original sin is his emphasis on the active role of human freedom in sin. For him every man has inherited from Adam not sin itself but the precondition of sin. He stresses that sin is actualized by man's free act. John A. Bain finds an inconsistency in Kierkegaard's view of sin between the Fragments and The Concept of Dread, though he tends to identify Kierkegaard's view with the latter. For Bain, in the former sin is considered as the inherent nature of man, whereas in the latter it is an act of will.¹ This seems to misinterpret Kierkegaard's view of sin in the Fragments. For in the Fragments Kierkegaard defines the word "sin" as follows:

The Teacher is then the God himself, who in acting as an occasion prompts the learner to recall that he is in Error, and that by reason of his own guilt. But this state, the being in Error by reason of one's own guilt, what shall we call it? Let us call it Sin.²

Here Kierkegaard is clearly saying that man in the state of error is "by reason of his own guilt." The word "guilt," in Kierkegaard's usage, is an ethical and spiritual category. Consequently, his view of sin in the Fragments is consistent with The Concept of Dread, namely that it is primarily a free act of will.

¹John A. Bain, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 66.

²Fragments, p. 19.

In The Sickness unto Death Kierkegaard affirms sin as the result of the will. "Christianly understood, sin lies in the will, not in the intellect."¹ One sins before God, "for every sin is before God."² This is the reason why Kierkegaard insists that "the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith."³ His definition of faith is "that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."⁴ If sin is the opposite of faith, it follows that sin is an act of alienation of oneself from God, the ground of being.

If sin is located in the will rather than the intellect, this brings Kierkegaard to break with Socrates. For Socrates, "sin is ignorance."⁵ Kierkegaard's criticism is that if sin is ignorance, then sin properly does not exist, for sin is definitely located in consciousness or will.

The Greek intellectualism was too happy, too naïve, too aesthetic, too ironical, too witty . . . too sinful to be able to get it into its head that a person knowingly could fail to do the good, or knowingly, with knowledge of what was right, do what was wrong. The Greek spirit purposes an intellectual categorical imperative.⁶

Furthermore, Kierkegaard insists that there must be a revelation from God in order to know what sin is. "Sin does not consist in the fact that man has not understood what is

¹Sickness, p. 226.

²Ibid., p. 211.

³Ibid., p. 213.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 218.

⁶Ibid., pp. 220-221.

right, but in the fact that he will not understand it, and in the fact that he will not do it."¹ This is an offense to the natural man. "The possibility of the offense consists in the fact that there has to be a revelation from God to enlighten man as to what sin ~~is~~ and how deep it lies."²

In short, sin is a paradox, for it is both inherited and an act of free will. Kierkegaard insists that sin is biological, for the preconditions of sin, such as dread, spirit, sexuality, and knowledge of good and evil, are inherited from Adam. But Kierkegaard also maintains that sin is an act of free choice, and thus belongs to the ethical and spiritual category. For him, the ethico-spiritual and the biological are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between the ethico-spiritual and the biological in sin that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between the ethico-spiritual and the biological is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of sin is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, the ethico-spiritual and the biological are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in

¹Ibid., p. 226.

²Ibid.

the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of sin is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of sin belongs to the sphere of faith.

ii. The Forgiveness of Sin

According to Kierkegaard, the forgiveness of sin is an offense to the natural man. He states, "The sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins is offense. The Jews were quite right in being offended at Christ because He would forgive sins."¹ Furthermore, he affirms that "to believe in forgiveness of sin is a paradox, is an absurdity, etc. etc."² The paradox of the forgiveness of sin lies in that sin is in fact committed and yet it is obliterated by the mercy of God. Therefore, it takes great courage to believe in the forgiveness of sin.

I assume then that someone has had the extreme courage of faith to believe, in truth, that God literally has forgotten his sins--a courage not found maybe in ten persons in each generation,

¹Ibid., p. 247.

²The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Gerda M. Andersen, ed. Peter F. Rohde (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), p. 154. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Diary.

this insane courage: after having developed a reasoned idea of God then to believe that God quite literally can forget.¹

From his Journal we find that it is even more difficult for Kierkegaard to believe fully in the forgiveness of sin. This indeed can be traced to his own and his father's sin. His father married Søren's mother, the housekeeper, before the year of mourning of his first wife was over. The first child was born five months after the wedding. This made the old father never forgive himself for his incontinence. The father was convinced that his sin had brought doom upon the entire family. The sudden deaths of most of his children were considered an enigmatic sign of God's displeasure.²

Kierkegaard never forgot the sin which he had committed in his youth, for on one occasion his bad companions made him drunk and took him to a brothel. There is no doubt that this is one of the basic reasons which deterred him from marrying Regine. Kierkegaard was remorseful that he had exactly repeated his father's sins, both in his sexual fall and in his defiance of God.³ He considered it his duty to be a lifelong penitent to atone for the sins of his youth. At the end of the first period of his literary activity he

¹Ibid.

²Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, I, pp. 19-27.

³Ibid., I, pp. 132-139.

seriously planned to become a country pastor. His motive was in part that he might by doing good works atone for his sins.¹

Kierkegaard's difficulty in understanding the forgiveness of sin is expressed in his Journal particularly in 1846. He writes, "But the crux of the forgiveness of sins is to make it valid in time."² In the same year he also asserts:

The forgiveness of sins cannot be such that with one blow God wipes out all guilt, obliterates all its consequences. Such a desire is only a worldly longing which does not rightly know what guilt is. It is only the guilt which is forgiven, the forgiveness of sins is not more. It does not mean to become a new man under happier circumstances, but to become a new man in the consoling assurance that the guilt is forgiven, even though the consequences of sin remain.³

This means that God's forgiveness is applicable only to guilt but not the consequences of sin.

Two years later, April 24, 1848, Easter Monday, Kierkegaard wrote:

To be sure, I believe in the forgiveness of sins, but I understand it as hitherto, that I must bear my punishment all my life, of remaining in the painful prison of my isolation, in a profound sense cut off from communication with other men-- nevertheless softened by the thought that God has forgiven me. I cannot as yet attain such a faith as to believe (I cannot as yet achieve such a freedom of belief as to believe) that painful memory away. But believing I arm myself against

¹ John A. Bain, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 70.

² Journals, no. 581.

³ Ibid., no. 606.

despair, bearing the pain and punishment of self-isolation--and am so indescribably fortunate or happy in the spiritual activity which God has so richly and so graciously granted me.¹

This passage shows that Kierkegaard has not yet changed his view of forgiveness; but he is struggling to arrive at an assurance that his sins are forgiven by God.

A week later, on his 35th birthday, May 5, 1848, Kierkegaard experienced his second conversion. This event leads him closer to the understanding of the true meaning of forgiveness. He experiences the belief that his sin is not only forgiven but forgotten by God. On May 11 he wrote, "But belief in the forgiveness of sins means to believe that here in time the sin is forgotten by God, that it is really true that God forgets."²

One who has experienced the forgiveness of sin becomes a new man, a spiritual man, in whom eternity is united in time. This thought is found in Kierkegaard's Journal.

He who then in truth has experienced, and experiences, the belief that his sins have been forgiven probably becomes a changed man. Everything is forgotten--yet it is not with him as with the child who, after having been forgiven, remains essentially unchanged. No, a man has added an eternity to his age; for now he has become spirit, all spontaneity and attendant selfishness, its selfish clinging to the world and to its own self, are lost. Now, humanly speaking, he is old, extremely old, but from the viewpoint of eternity he is young.³

¹Ibid., no. 749.

²Ibid., no. 753.

³Diary, p. 154.

Kierkegaard thus insists that one of the tasks of Christianity is to preach the forgiveness of sin. This task is "a splendour that is without equal."¹ In Christianity, the forgiveness of sin must not be regarded as simply a removal of sin, but also a becoming of a new man.

In short, Kierkegaard affirms that the forgiveness of sin is a paradox which must be believed but not to be understood. The paradoxical nature of the forgiveness of sin lies in the fact that it involves both the recognition of sin and the remission of sin. The recognition of sin and the remission of sin are two opposite existential entities. It is the joint relationship between the recognition of sin and the remission of sin in God's forgiveness that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between the recognition of sin and the remission of sin is absolute, the paradox cannot be resolved by reason. In other words, the paradox of the forgiveness of sin is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, the recognition of sin and the remission of sin are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of the forgiveness is beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of the forgiveness of sin must be accepted by faith.

¹Walter Lowrie, "Introduction," Postscript, p. xix.

5. The Spheres of Human Existence

According to Kierkegaard, there are three stages on life's way--the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Since the religious stage includes religiousness A and religiousness B, we may also say that there are four stages on life's way. To be more exact, there are "spheres" of human existence rather than "stages," for the latter would suggest a necessary movement through a series of steps. But for Kierkegaard, there is a leap rather than a necessary movement between these stages. Furthermore, as Walter Lowrie has pointed out, "The word 'stages' seems to imply that with each advance the preceding stage is definitely left behind."¹ But for Kierkegaard, when one moves to the higher stage, the lower stage is even included. As a matter of fact, Kierkegaard speaks of "existence-spheres" in Stages on Life's Way.² As we have mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard seems to be influenced by Hegelian dialectics in his theory of three

¹Walter Lowrie, "Introduction," Postscript, p. xix.

²Stages on Life's Way, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 430. Hereafter this work will be designated by the abbreviated title Stages.

spheres of existence. However, between these spheres there is a leap which is definitely non-Hegelian.

These three spheres represent three different values and ideals. The religious sphere is subdivided into two--religiousness A and religiousness B. Religiousness B refers to paradoxical religiousness which is Christianity. For Kierkegaard, religiousness B is the highest sphere of human existence or the highest value of human life. It must be kept in mind that Kierkegaard insists that the paradox is located in religiousness B and not in other spheres. In other words, Kierkegaard's view of Christianity is paradoxical.

Kierkegaard maintains that one does not become a Christian merely by birth.¹ There was great confusion in his day due to people mixing up the different spheres of existence, and Christianity being erroneously reduced to the aesthetic sphere. Kierkegaard stresses that in order to become a Christian one must move upwards from sphere to sphere. However, one may choose to remain in the aesthetic or the ethical life without reaching the sphere of Christianity. The movement from sphere to sphere is not by a necessary evolution, but only by a leap or free decision on the part of the individual.

¹Postscript, p. 523.

Kierkegaard holds that Christianity is paradoxical, for it is in the sphere of paradoxical religiousness.¹ However, it must be noted that the sphere of Christianity is closely related to other spheres. The spheres are successive developments in a process moving toward a more perfect and a richer life. Each sphere contains some quality which is transformed and is to be found in the higher spheres. When one passes into the ethical sphere the aesthetic is "not abolished but dethroned."² Thus in the ethical sphere the aesthetic awareness is found but in a more adequate form. Moreover, in the religious sphere the aesthetic immediacy is found but it is transformed into "the new immediacy, and one which can never be abrogated in existence, since it is the highest immediacy, and its abrogation would reduce a man to null and nothing."³ In the same manner, the religious sphere "lies so close to the ethical that they are in constant communication with one another."⁴ For Kierkegaard, the religious life incorporates ethical decision even though it transcends the goal of the latter. Thus when one reaches the sphere of Christianity, he does not leave behind the qualities of the aesthetic and the ethical, but these are transformed and redeemed so that a full human existence is found in this highest sphere.

¹Ibid., p. 507.

²Lowrie, "Introduction," ibid., p. xix.

³Ibid., p. 310, footnote.

⁴Ibid., pp. 144-45.

This shows that the spheres overlap and penetrate one another. In order to understand the paradoxical nature of the Christian sphere of existence, it is necessary to deal with the aesthetic first and then move to higher spheres.

1. The Aesthetic Sphere

The first sphere of existence is the aesthetic. The distinctive features of the aesthetic life are as follows. First, the aesthetic life is that of pleasure. The whole life of the aesthete "was motivated by enjoyment. In the first instance he enjoyed the aesthetic personally, in the second instance he enjoyed his aesthetic personality."¹ The aesthete lives primarily for enjoyment. However, he does not want merely enjoyment but its variety in his life; he seeks to avoid boredom as the worst evil that can ever overtake him.

See him [The aesthete] in his season of pleasure: did he not crave for one pleasure after another, variety his watchword? Is variety, then, the willing of one thing that abides the same? Nay, rather it is the willing of something that must never be the same. But that is just to will the manifold, and a man with such a will is not only double-minded but all at variance with himself, for he wills one thing and immediately after the opposite, because oneness of pleasure is disappointment and illusion, and it is the variety of pleasures that he wills.²

¹ Either/Or, I, 301301.

² Purify Your Hearts!, trans. A. S. Aldworth and W. S. Ferrie (London: Daniel, 1938), pp. 43-44.

Since the aesthete seeks for the variety of pleasures, "change was what he was crying out for when pleasure pandered to him, change, change!"¹

Secondly, the aesthetic life is that of immediacy. In comparison with other spheres, "the aesthetic sphere is that of immediacy, the ethical that of requirement . . . the religious sphere is that of fulfilment."² This immediacy is unreflective, for there is no sense of right or wrong in it. It is identified with fortune.

Immediacy is fortune, for in the immediate consciousness there is no contradiction; the immediate individual is essentially seen as a fortunate individual, and the view of life natural to immediacy is one based on fortune The contradiction comes from without, and takes the form of misfortune. The immediate individual never comes to any understanding with misfortune, for he never becomes dialectical in himself; and if he does not manage to get rid of it, he finally reveals himself as lacking the poise to bear it.³

This means that the aesthete avoids all paradox and suffering. "The aesthetical in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is."⁴

This leads directly to the third characteristic of the aesthetic life, namely that aesthetic life is for the moment or the temporal. "This is in its generality the essential aesthetic principle, namely, that the moment is everything."⁵

¹Ibid., p. 44.

²Stages, p. 430.

³Postscript, p. 388.

⁴Either/Or, II, 182.

⁵Postscript, p. 265.

The aesthete does not know eternal demands, and his whole sphere of interest does not extend beyond the border of the temporal. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates, Abraham, and Job are the men who realize eternal demands. Socrates finds the eternal truth within himself. Abraham obeys God, for he believes that the claim of God is higher than all temporal laws. Job too believes God as Lord of all: He gives and takes away, and nobody has authority over Him.

Fourthly, the aesthetic life is that of detachment or indifference. If the aesthete seeks only for pleasure and its variety, and if he lives only in the immediacy and moment, then his personality lacks unity and continuity. There is no past or future in his life, but only the present. Such a person never commits himself to responsibility. He uses the technique of seduction but never commits himself in a promise. He makes love but never commits himself in marriage. His view of marriage is: "One must never enter into the relation to marriage. Husband and wife promise to love one another for eternity."¹ This is what David F. Swenson calls "the love-is-heaven-but-marriage-is-hell school of thought."² For the aesthete, "woman is only the moment."³ The aesthete never makes ethical decision, for he has no eternal goals in his life. His way of life is:

¹Either/Or, I, 292.

²Swenson, "Introduction," Fragments, p. xxiii.

³Postscript, p. 265.

If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or do not marry, you will regret both.¹

According to Kierkegaard, Hegelians also belong to the aesthetic sphere. As the hedonist loses himself in the immediacy of the erotic present, so the Hegelian loses himself in the immediacy of his thought. Moreover, the attitude of these two is that of detachment and non-involvement. As the hedonist shields himself from responsibility by enjoying momentary pleasure, so the Hegelian relieves himself of ethical choice by acting as an objective observer.

The above are the essential characteristics of the aesthetic life. Such a life inevitably ends up with boredom and despair. For the aesthete, "boredom is the root of all evil."² Hence he tries to avoid boredom by the "rotation method."³ He is bored with life in the country, so he moves to the city; he then becomes bored with his native land, so he travels abroad. But this continuing change does not help himself alleviate his boredom. The aesthete seeks for pleasure, yet no pleasure can satisfy him. The result is a life meaningless and empty. "Life has become a bitter drink to me, and yet I must take it like medicine, slowly, drop

¹Either/Or, I, 37.

²Ibid., I, 281.

³Ibid., pp. 281-296.

by drop."¹ "My life is absolutely meaningless."²

However, despair provides for the aesthete a possibility of upward movement. He can move upward if he realizes the vanity of enjoyment and turns to ethical commitment. Kierkegaard further states that "irony" constitutes "the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical."³

Irony arises from the constant placing of the particularities of the finite together with the infinite ethical requirement, thus permitting the contradiction to come into being.⁴

It is irony revealing the ethical requirement which provides for the aesthete the pathway to the ethical sphere.

In sum, the aesthetic sphere is characterized as pleasure, immediacy, temporality, and detachment. Thus the aesthetic life leads necessarily to boredom and despair. However, despair provides for the aesthete a possibility to move upward. Irony is the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical sphere.

ii. The Ethical Sphere

Upon entering the ethical sphere the qualities of the ~~aesthetical~~ are not totally excluded.

By the absolute choice the ethical is posited, but from this it does not follow by any means that the aesthetical is excluded. In the ethical

¹Ibid., I, 25. .

²Ibid., I, 35. .

³Postscript, p. 448.

⁴Ibid.

the personality is concentrated in itself, so the aesthetical is absolutely excluded or is excluded as the absolute, but relatively it is still left.¹

This means that the aesthetical still exists in the ethical relatively though not absolutely. The aesthetical is dethroned, and yet it has some validity in the ethical sphere.

So when the individual develops ethically he becomes that which he becomes; for even when he allows the aesthetical within him to possess validity (which for him has not at all the same meaning as for the man who lives aesthetically) it is nevertheless dethroned.²

Kierkegaard insists that the aesthetical is transfigured in the ethical sphere. "The ethical then will not change the individual into another man but makes him himself, it will not annihilate the aesthetical but transfigures it."³

Now, what are the characteristics of the ethical life? First, the ethical life is that of duty. The ethical man lives for the sake of fulfilling his duty.

In opposition to an aesthetical view which would enjoy life, one often hears of another view which finds the significance of life in living for the fulfillment of its duties.⁴

The ethical man is committed to his duty, and he is not satisfied with the life of indifference. Kant's view is a good example of the ethical man, for he urges us to do our duties

¹Either/Or, II, 181-182.

²Ibid., II, 230.

³Ibid., II, 257-258.

⁴Ibid., II, 258.

rather than follow our natural inclinations.

Secondly, the ethical life is that of choice. The aesthete has no choice, for he is immediately what he is.

The act of choosing is essentially a proper and stringent expression of the ethical. Whenever in a stricter sense there is question of an either/or, one can always be sure that the ethical is involved. The only absolute either/or is the choice between good and evil, but that is also absolutely ethical. The aesthetic choice is either entirely immediate and to that extent no choice, or it loses itself in the multifarious.¹

Choice is the act of the ethical man. By making choice, his life is centralized and unified. "He does not become another man than he was before, but he becomes himself, consciousness is unified, and he is himself."² Moreover, choice involves freedom or an either/or which is the most precious thing in man.

Thirdly, the ethical life is that of universality. The aesthete lives in the moment and is accidental, whereas the ethical man lives for the universal obligation. "The ethical is the universal."³

He who lives aesthetically is the accidental man; he believes himself to be the perfect man by reason of the fact that he is the only man. He who lives ethically labors to become the universal man.⁴

In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard further insists on the

¹ Ibid., II, 170-171.

² Ibid., II, 181.

³ Ibid., II, 259.

⁴ Ibid., II, 260.

universality of the ethical, for it can be applicable to everyone and every instant.¹ Hence, the task of the ethical man is "to abolish his particularity in order to become the universal."² This shows that the life of the ethical has continuity. The aesthete lives only in the present, whereas the ethical man has past and future within himself.

Fourthly, the ethical life is that of marriage. Marriage life involves commitment and duty which differ from the non-commitment of the aesthetical life. According to Kierkegaard, the figure of Judge William in Either/Or is a good example of the ethical man. The Judge is a married man who has committed himself in conjugal love. The differences between romantic love and conjugal love are that the former is momentary, changeable and hence irresponsible, but the latter is stable, constant and hence responsible. However, conjugal love is not unrelated to romantic love; for "romantic love can be united with and can persist in marriage, yea, that marriage is the true transfiguration of romantic love."³ In other words, marriage requires resolution in addition to the immediacy of love.

In Kierkegaard's view, the happiness of marriage depends upon what one can give rather than what he can receive. This

¹ Fear, p. 64.

² Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³ Either/Or, II, 31.

in fact is one of the ethical qualities. Moreover, marriage enriches feminine beauty.

Woman as a bride is more beautiful than as a young girl, as a mother she is more beautiful than a bride, as wife and mother she is a good word spoken in due season, and with the years she becomes more beautiful.¹

It seems strange that Kierkegaard knows the value of marriage so well, and yet he refuses to get married. He states, "Marriage is a school for character; one marries in order to ennoble and improve one's character."² Hence, "it is the duty of every man to marry."³ However, Kierkegaard insists that the requirements of marriage are "open-heartedness, candor, publicity on the largest conceivable scale; for this is the life-principle of love, and here in the intimate life secretiveness is its death."⁴ This perhaps is one of the reasons which prevents Kierkegaard from marriage, for he does not want his secret sins to be revealed before his dearest lover, Regine. In his Journal, he writes, "From an aesthetic and chivalrous point of view I loved her in a far higher sense than she loved me;" hence "purely aesthetically speaking I was a great man."⁵ However, ethically speaking, he lacks openheartedness.

¹ Stages, p. 141.

² Either/Or, II, 65.

³ Ibid., II, 306.

⁴ Ibid., II, 106.

⁵ Journals, no. 444.

The above are the characteristics of the ethical life. The value of the ethical life is superior to the aesthetic life. However, there are limits in the ethical. According to Kierkegaard, the ethical man is devoted to the universal, and thus fails to leave room for the religious exception. Abraham is a prototype of the religious exception. He is called by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. This is a task which is a scandal to the ethical, for it is a violation of moral law. The act of Abraham is based on his absolute faith in God and His promises, and thus he becomes a single individual by denying the universal. This is a "teleological suspension of the ethical."¹ In this way Abraham passes from the ethical to the religious sphere.

Kierkegaard has been much criticized at this point.² However, it must be noted that he does not deny the value of moral law, and he does not mean that God's will is always in opposition to moral law. The point of Kierkegaard is that there are limits in moral law due to human sin. Hence, moral law must always be ready to be revised by God's law, for He alone is good and His will alone is perfect. James Collins interprets this point as follows:

As understood by Kierkegaard, Kantian ethics places man's supreme perfection and end in a conformity with universal law. Kierkegaard's

¹ Fear, p. 64.

² This perhaps is due to the fact that he gives us an extreme and inhumane example, i.e. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. In the writer's opinion, this is a bad and improper example.

rejoinder is that virtue is not an end in itself and that universal moral laws must themselves refer back to the author of the law, if there is any question of diverting the individual from a search for God Himself.¹

As "irony" constitutes the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical, so "humor" constitutes the boundary which separates the ethical from the religious sphere.² "Humor is the last stage of existential inwardness before faith."³

Humor is not faith but comes before faith. By humor we can achieve some feeling of paradox. However, ~~it gives us a sense~~

even when humor makes an attempt at the paradoxes, it is not faith. Humor does not absorb the suffering side of the paradox, nor the ethical side of faith, but merely the amusing aspect.⁴

In sum, duty, choice, universality, and marriage are the characteristics of the ethical life. However, the ethical life has its limits, for it fails to accept the religious exception. It is humor which constitutes the boundary between the ethical and the religious spheres.

iii. The Religious Sphere

The religious sphere is divided into two levels of existence: religiousness A and religiousness B. Religiousness A is the religiousness of immanence, whereas religiousness B is the "paradoxical religiousness" or

¹Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, p. 192.

²Postscript, p. 448.

³Ibid., p. 259.

⁴Ibid.

Christianity.¹ Religiousness A is "pathetic," whereas religiousness B is "dialectic."² According to Kierkegaard, religiousness A "is not the specifically Christian religiousness."³ However, "religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any question of becoming aware of the dialectic B."⁴

(1) Religiousness A

Religiousness A is based on the supposition that truth is immanent in man, and that

within the individual man there is a potentiality (man is potentially spirit) which is awakened in inwardness to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere.⁵

This means that religiousness A can exist without revelation. But this is not so in religiousness B, for in Christianity man is in a state of error, and so the truth must be given only from God in His revelation in Jesus Christ.

There are three distinctive expressions for existential pathos in religiousness A. First, the "initial" expression is "the absolute direction (respect) toward the absolute telos, expressed in action through the transformation of the individual's existence."⁶ In order to achieve an absolute

¹Ibid., p. 507.

²Ibid., p. 493.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 494.

⁵Ibid., pp. 220-21.

⁶Ibid., p. 347.

relationship to the absolute telos, one must exercise oneself in "the renunciation of relative ends."¹

Secondly, the "essential" expression for existential pathos is suffering.² Religious suffering is not the result of external misfortune, but is the tension between the finite and infinite.

This suffering has its ground in the fact that the individual is in his immediacy absolutely committed to relative ends; its significance lies in the transposition of the relationship, the dying away from immediacy, or in the expression existentially of the principle that the individual can do absolutely nothing of himself, but is as nothing before God.³

In other words, religious suffering is a dying away from the world and the immediate.

Thirdly, the "decisive" expression for existential pathos is guilt.⁴ Since the individual is a concretion in time, "he is ethically responsible for his use of time."⁵ His task is to die to immediacy in seeking the absolute telos absolutely. Since he is in existence, the individual does not seek the absolute telos absolutely, hence he is guilty. Guilt is the most concrete expression of existence.

The more abstract the individual is, the less is he related to an eternal happiness, and the more

¹Ibid., p. 386.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 412.

⁴Ibid., p. 468.

⁵Ibid., p. 469.

remote he is from guilt; for abstraction assumes the indifference of existence, but guilt is the expression for the strongest self-assertion of existence, and after all it is an exister who is to relate himself to an eternal happiness.¹

In short, religiousness A is the religiousness of immanence, and its existential pathos is expressed in the absolute direction toward the absolute telos, in suffering, and in the consciousness of guilt.

(2) Religiousness B

Religiousness B refers to paradoxical religiousness or Christianity which is the sphere of paradox. According to Kierkegaard, paradox exists only in this sphere but not in other spheres.

Immediacy, the aesthetic, finds no contradiction in the fact of existing: to exist is one thing, and the contradiction is something else which comes from without. The ethical finds the contradiction, but within self-assertion. The religiousness A comprehends the contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, although within immanence.²

But religiousness B is the sphere of paradox. "The paradoxical religiousness breaks with immanence and makes the fact of existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence, but against immanence."³

Kierkegaard suggests that there are three reasons why

¹Ibid., p. 470.

²Ibid., p. 507.

³Ibid.

religiousness B is the sphere of paradox. First, the paradox lies in the fact that "to expect an eternal happiness in time through a relationship to something else in time."¹ In religiousness A, the eternal is considered as immanent within time, and man is always in contact with eternity. But in religiousness B, the eternal comes into the world at a moment of time and at a definite place. This is a breach with the religiousness of immanence.

In the religiousness A the eternal is ubique et nusquam, but concealed by the actuality of existence; in the paradoxical religiousness the eternal is at a definite place, and precisely this is breach with immanence.²

Secondly, the paradox lies in the fact that "an eternal happiness is based upon something historical."³ It is evident that the eternal is higher than anything historical. Hence, in the religiousness of immanence, the individual does not base his eternal happiness on something historical but on the eternal.⁴ However, in Christianity the individual bases his eternal happiness on something historical, namely, the Deity in time. "The contradiction is: to base one's eternal happiness upon an approximation," for all historical knowledge attains no certainty, but an approximation.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 505.

²Ibid., p. 506.

³Ibid., p. 508.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 509.

Thirdly, the paradox lies in the fact that

the historical fact here in question is not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd.¹

Christianity asserts that "the Deity, the Eternal, came into being at a definite moment in time as an individual man."² This is not a simple fact, but a unique one. The assertion that the eternal comes into existence in time, is born, grows up, and dies, is beyond human understanding. Hence, Christianity is paradoxical. "If anyone imagines that he understands it, he can be sure that he misunderstands it."³ The paradox of Christianity is not to be understood but to be believed. "He who understands the paradox will in his misunderstanding forget that Christianity is the absolute paradox."⁴

These are the three reasons why religiousness B is called paradoxical religiousness. According to Kierkegaard, there are three expressions of the pathos of religiousness B. In addition to these, every Christian also "possesses the pathos of religiousness A."⁵ Now let us deal with these three expressions of the pathos of religiousness B.

The first is "sin-consciousness." Sin-consciousness is

¹Ibid., p. 512.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 513-14.

⁴Ibid., p. 515.

⁵Ibid., p. 516.

different from guilt-consciousness. Guilt is a disrelationship of the individual with himself, whereas sin is a disrelationship of the individual with God. In guilt-consciousness, the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, whereas in sin-consciousness the subject "has become another than he was, has become a sinner."¹ Moreover, guilt-consciousness is acquired by the individual himself, whereas sin-consciousness is a breach with immanence, and "precisely one which cannot be thought."²

The second is "the possibility of offense." In religiousness A the offense is not possible, for it is the religiousness of immanence which claims the continuity between divinity and humanity. In contrast, "Christianity is the only power which is able truly to arouse offense," for the Deity in time is "the paradox, which requires faith against the understanding."³ The complaint of Kierkegaard is that in Christendom "Christianity has become so naturalized and so accommodated to the world that nobody dreams of the offense."⁴

The third is "the smart of sympathy." In religiousness A, the individual has "a latent sympathy for fellow-feeling with every man qua man."⁵ But in Christianity, the individual

¹Ibid., p. 517.

²Ibid., p. 518.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 519.

"with the whole passion of his soul bases his blessedness upon terms which involve a relation to something historical," hence "to him it applies or may apply that he must hate father and mother."¹

In short, Kierkegaard asserts that religiousness B or Christianity is a paradox and has "possibility of offense," and therefore it requires the response of faith. For him, the paradoxical nature of Christianity lies in the fact that the eternal happiness of the individual bases on something historical, namely the God in time. In Kierkegaard's view, the eternal happiness of the individual involves eternity and certainty, whereas the historical involves temporality and uncertainty, for the historical is accidental. It is the joint relationship between eternal happiness and something historical in Christianity that constitutes a paradox. Since the difference between eternal happiness and something historical is absolute, the paradox of Christianity is absolute rather than relative. Moreover, eternal happiness and something historical are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, the paradox of Christianity is beyond the comprehension

¹Ibid.

of reason. Finally, since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, the paradox of Christianity must be accepted by faith.

6. Summary

Paradox occupies a central place in Kierkegaard's theology. In our investigation, God, Christ, man, sin, and Christianity are paradoxes in his theology. The paradox of God lies in the joint relationship between His transcendence and immanence. The paradox of Christ lies in the joint relationship between God and a particular man, or between his exaltation and lowliness. The paradox of man lies in the joint relationship between freedom and necessity, or between the eternal and the temporal. The paradox of sin lies in the joint relationship between the ethico-spiritual and the natural. The paradox of the forgiveness of sin lies in the joint relationship between the recognition of sin and the remission of sin. The paradox of Christianity lies in the joint relationship between the eternal happiness and something historical.

According to Kierkegaard, these paradoxes are absolute rather than relative, for they cannot be resolved by reason. Moreover, these paradoxes are not mere concepts but refer to existence. Since Kierkegaard holds that existence is not the object of reason in the sense of traditional logic, these paradoxes are beyond the comprehension of reason. Finally,

since Kierkegaard insists that existence is the object of faith, these paradoxes belong to the sphere of faith.

The above discussion evidences what we have stated in the last chapter, namely that, in Kierkegaard's view, religion is the object of faith. For him, reason as an abstract logical function has no direct access to religion. However, reason has a function in language or statements about religion, for reason, according to Kierkegaard, deals only with thought but not existence.

CHAPTER VI. CRITICAL EVALUATION

To evaluate fairly Kierkegaard's thought is not an easy task. His mind is too many-sided to be understood from merely a single angle. Many of his readers seem to ignore this point. The result of this is that there are many extremely different reactions to his thought. As George Price has pointed out:

Kierkegaard was the sanest man of his generation Kierkegaard was a schizophrenic Kierkegaard was the greatest Dane . . . the difficult Dane . . . the gloomy Dane . . . Kierkegaard was the greatest Christian of the century Kierkegaard's aim was the destruction of the historic Christian faith He did not attack philosophy as such He neglected reason He was a voluntarist Kierkegaard was the Knight of Faith Kierkegaard never found faith Kierkegaard possessed the truth Kierkegaard was one of the damned ¹

¹George Price, The Narrow Pass (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 11.

In order to be fair in our critical evaluation of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, we must always keep in mind the total context of his thought. Moreover, in order to have a more fruitful evaluation, we shall not only criticize the internal consistency of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, but also show its significance for our present age. We shall first deal with his contributions and then his weaknesses.

1. Contributions

Kierkegaard was a nineteenth-century theologian, and yet he was paid little attention in his day. We are told that the Postscript, the greatest book of Kierkegaard, sold only sixty copies within three years after its publication and it was nowhere reviewed.¹ But in the twentieth century his thought has been paid much more attention than before. As Richard H. Niebuhr says, Kierkegaard "belongs less to the history of nineteenth century thought than to that of the twentieth."²

¹Papier, X6 B114, cited in "Editor's Preface," Postscript, p. xi.

²Richard H. Niebuhr, "Søren Kierkegaard," Carl Michalson (ed.), Christianity and the Existentialists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 25.

In philosophy Kierkegaard's preoccupation with human existence and the priority of the individual has led to the development of various philosophies of existence. In this sense, he may be called the "father of modern existentialism." In theology his emphasis on paradox has greatly influenced the dialectical theology. Emil Brunner states that Kierkegaard is "the greatest Christian thinker of modern time."¹

In the following we shall discuss the merits of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox.

(1) Kierkegaard's concept of paradox is an illumination of religious understanding and a protest against the rationalization of Christian faith. By stating the paradox of God, Kierkegaard intends to insist that there is a difference between God and man. In doing so, he attempts to affirm an essential Christian faith, namely the transcendence of God. He states, "The-essential paradox is precisely the protest against immanence."² In a time when the immanent view of God was one-sidedly prevailing, Kierkegaard's stress on the transcendence of God was a needed corrective. But we must remember that by emphasizing the transcendence of God,

¹ Emil Brunner, Truth as Encounter, trans. A. W. Loos and D. Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), p. 112.

² On Authority and Revelation, p. 107.

Kierkegaard does not ignore the immanence of God.

Moreover, by revealing the difference between God and man, Kierkegaard wants to explain the meaning of sin. As we have said, Kierkegaard's insistence upon the difference between God and man is due to the fact that man is a sinner and God is not. For Kierkegaard, human reason lacks a consciousness of sin. His stress on the difference between God and man in part is to lead men to the consciousness of sin. Therefore, he states:

Thus our paradox is rendered still more appalling, or the same paradox has the double aspect which proclaims it as the Absolute Paradox; negatively by revealing the absolute unlikeness of sin, positively by proposing to do away with the absolute unlikeness in absolute likeness.¹

In addition, by emphasizing the paradox of Christ, Kierkegaard tries to describe the historical event of the Incarnation. In the Incarnation God becomes a true man, and in the humanity of Jesus he does not cease to be true God. In the words of Kierkegaard, Jesus Christ is "the God-man." The paradox of Christ lies precisely in the fact that both God and a particular man are inseparably united in this person. Thus, the paradox of Christ is a reaction against both Ebionitism and Gnosticism which, in Kierkegaard's view, attempt to rationalize Christian faith by eliminating the divine or the human.

¹Fragments, p. 59.

The error with regard to the God-man took one or another of two forms: either that of eliminating the qualification God (Ebionitism), or that of eliminating the qualification man (Gnosticism).¹

It is Kierkegaard's belief that the Saviour must be the God-man who is both true God and true man.

For Kierkegaard, man is a paradox. Here he soundly describes the anxiety of human existence as being both free and limited, both eternal and temporal. The paradox of man is an essential clue for us to understand the Christian concept of sin and faith. Sin is primarily an act of man's disobedience to God, namely a misuse of freedom, whereas faith is a decision of man's obedience to God, namely a proper use of freedom. This is the reason why Kierkegaard asserts that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith. According to him, the task of man is to ~~become~~ or actualize spirit or self. This task is never finished. Kierkegaard rightly recognizes that man is not a static being but is in process of becoming. Therefore, there is always room for continual growth in person. This is the reason why he prefers to speak of "becoming a Christian" rather than being a Christian.

This shows that Kierkegaard's paradox is a useful category to interpret the truth of Christianity.

(2) In accord with the biblical accounts, Kierkegaard recognizes the depth of human sin and the need of redemption. For Kierkegaard, sin is the opposite of faith. Sin is an act of alienation of the creature from his Creator. It is a perversion of the good creation. In consequence, man is "in error by reason of one's own guilt."¹ Man not only is destitute of the truth but also is departing from seeking the truth. Here Kierkegaard rejects the suggestion that man can free himself from the bondage to error and sin by his own power. Therefore, he is opposed to the view of Socrates that the truth is within each individual and does not have to be communicated to him from outside.

According to Kierkegaard, the teacher who can free man from the error and gives him the condition for understanding the truth must be more than a teacher. He must be "Saviour," for he saves the learner from his bondage and from himself," and he must be "Redeemer," for he redeems the learner from the captivity into which he had plunged himself."² Here Kierkegaard soundly stresses the importance of Christ's work.

Kierkegaard holds that human sin is not only forgiven but also forgotten by God through the atonement of Christ.

¹Fragments, p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 21.

"Belief in the forgiveness of sins means to believe that here in time the sin is forgotten by God, that it is really true that God forgets."¹ Moreover, he recognizes the possibility of the renewal of man through the grace of God.

He [the disciple] becomes another man; not in the frivolous sense of becoming another individual of the same quality as before, but in the sense of becoming a man of a different quality, or as we may call him: a new creature.²

This shows that Kierkegaard soundly stresses the essential nature of the gospel, namely that man's deepest need is soteriological rather than epistemological.

(3) Kierkegaard recognizes the inadequacy in a merely objective or intellectual acceptance of Christianity and shows the need of subjective or personal involvement in Christian faith. In the day of Kierkegaard there was a lack of religious passion among Christians. Kierkegaard writes, "Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion."³ The general attitude of Christians is "lukewarmness and indifferentism."⁴ "If anyone desires to be a Christian with infinite passion he is judged to be a fool."⁵ This objective attitude of Christians, in Kierkegaard's opinion, is influenced by Hegelianism.

¹Journals, no. 753.

²Fragments, pp. 22-23.

³The Present Age, p. 33.

⁴Attack, p. 185.

⁵Postscript, p. 193.

This shows that Kierkegaard's stress on subjectivity is a needed corrective to his day. He wants to bring subjectivity to the age of pure objectivity. He insists that "all religion has to do with passion, with having passion."¹ For him, Christianity is not primarily an intellectual matter. Rather, the truth of Christianity is primarily subjectivity; it is an infinite interest in eternal happiness. However, Kierkegaard does not deny the objective aspect of Christianity. In the Fragments he maintains that God's revelation in Jesus Christ is a historical fact; it is the objective ground of Christianity. The point of Kierkegaard is that subjectivity is required to respond to this objective event.

According to Kierkegaard, the paradox of Christianity is an offense to reason. Thus the paradox is abolished by Hegelianism. Although the paradox is absurd from the standpoint of pure reason, Kierkegaard suggests that there is an alternative way to approach the paradox, namely, the way of faith or subjectivity. For Kierkegaard, the paradox is not an offense to the believer, for "true faith breathes healthily and blissfully in the Absurd."²

In our present age the religious situation is little different from Kierkegaard's day. The great achievement of

¹Attack, p. 185.

²Papier, X6 B79, cited in Johnson (ed.), A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 182.

modern science has strong influence on philosophy and religion. The result of this is the appearance of scientific empiricism. The basic attitude of this movement is objectivity. Objectivity is not confined only in this stream of thought; it has become a strong tendency among many believers. The truth of Christianity seems to become a purely intellectual matter. Objective appropriation to Christianity seems to be the only religious attitude.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity is an important reminder to Christians today. Kierkegaard rightly tells us that to know Christianity is not the same as to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to have a personal and passionate devotion to Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard rightly points out that Christianity is not simply a doctrine but a way of life.

Moreover, it is Kierkegaard's contribution that he holds that language about faith must correspond to human existence and subjectivity; otherwise, it is empty and useless. "Spiritually speaking, a man's thought must be the building in which he lives--otherwise, everything is topsy-turvy."¹ For this reason, language about faith is not to communicate results as much as it is to arouse human passion and

¹Journals, no. 583.

to stimulate the process of becoming Christian.

(4) Kierkegaard rightly reminds us that reason has limits. According to him, reason as an abstract logical function has no direct access to Christian faith. Thus he states, "For it is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are."¹ For him, Christian faith belongs to the sphere of existence, which is the object of subjective faith rather than the object of abstract, objective reason.

However, Kierkegaard recognizes that reason as an abstract logical function is valuable in the realm of thought. For him, reason deals with abstract thought but not concrete existence. Reason does not deal with subjective faith but theology or statements about faith. In this respect, reason has discerning, descriptive, attentive, and apologetic uses in theology. Reason can discern nonsense and prevent one from believing it. Reason can describe the data of religious experience. Reason can make one attentive to the historical basis of Christianity. Furthermore, reason can interpret Christian faith for a dialogue with contemporary culture.

¹Journals, no. 633.

But we shall point out later that Kierkegaard fails to recognize that there are other legitimate functions of reason in theology. In this sense, his view of reason is not adequate.

However, Kierkegaard gives us a useful reminder that human reason has limits. Reason does not constitute reality in religion. In this sense, Kierkegaard's view is a useful corrective to the theology which exaggerates reason to the detriment of revelation.

(5) Kierkegaard soundly insists that Christian faith is multi-dimensional; it includes the whole person in thinking, feeling, and willing. In his treatment of the spheres of human existence, Kierkegaard holds that the sphere of paradoxical religiousness is most inclusive. This sphere, namely Christianity, includes the qualities of the aesthetical, the ethical, and religiousness A. For example, in Christianity the aesthetic immediacy is not abrogated but it is transformed into "the new immediacy."¹ In Christianity we further find the element of ethical commitment, for Christianity and ethics are so closely related that "they are in constant communication with one another."² Moreover, the existential pathos of religiousness A--the absolute devotion, suffering, and the consciousness of guilt--are

¹Postscript, p. 310, footnote.

²Ibid., pp. 144-145.

found in Christianity.¹ Thus when one reaches the sphere of Christianity, he does not leave behind the qualities of previous spheres, but these are included and transformed into a full human existence.

Such a view of faith is in accord with the biblical teaching: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."² Christian faith is more than an intellectual assent to the doctrine; it is an absolute devotion of the whole person to God. In Kierkegaard's words, "Faith is: that the self in being itself and willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."³

Moreover, Kierkegaard rightly teaches us that faith and love are inseparable. Being a Christian he must engage in works of love, for the duty of the Christian is "in the debt of love to each another."⁴ Here Kierkegaard tells us that every Christian should follow the example of Christ. He emphasizes that the Christian is a follower rather than an admirer of Christ.

A follower is or strives to be what he admires; an admirer holds himself personally aloof, consciously or unconsciously, he does not discern

¹ Ibid., p. 497.

² Matt. 22: 37.

³ Sickness, p. 213.

⁴ Works of Love, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 171.

that the object of his admiration makes a claim upon him to be or to strive to be the thing he admires.¹

This means that Christians are not merely adherents to a doctrine but followers of a life.

This teaching of Kierkegaard speaks not only to his day but also to our day. Today many Christians are merely adherents to Christian doctrine or merely admirers of Christ. Kierkegaard teaches us to be followers of Christ. To be a Christian, one must not only devote only one aspect but the whole life to God.

(6) Kierkegaard is right to the extent that thought and existence are to be distinguished and not to be identified. But he is wrong, as we shall see, in making a complete separation between the two. For him, thought belongs to the sphere of possibility, universality, and objectivity, whereas existence belongs to the sphere of actuality, concreteness, and subjectivity.² Since thought and existence are not one, we cannot know existence through mere logic. The upshot of the matter is that the knowledge of reality must be a matter of encounter or confrontation. In other words, the problem of God's existence is experiential rather than inferential.

This has a significant implication for us today. It tells us that the views of the atheist and the agnostic are

¹Training, p. 234.

²Postscript, p. 302.

untenable. Atheists are wrong because they ignore that the existence of God can be neither proved nor disproved by speculative reason. If God could be reached by speculative reason, He would have to be conceived as a mere abstract idea and without a living reality. Although agnostics are right in recognizing that God cannot be known by speculative reason, they are wrong in refusing to admit the way of faith. Kierkegaard rightly tells us that our knowledge of God is through our personal relationship to God in Christ. Although reason cannot know God, Kierkegaard rightly admits that it does have a function in statements about God, i.e.,

(7) Finally, Kierkegaard has made a great contribution to philosophy by making it to be more concerned with life. His philosophy is intensively personal. He recovers the classic insight of Socrates that philosophy is primarily concerned with the existence of the individual. This does not mean that Kierkegaard denies the value of speculation. He insists that speculation is valid so long as it is rooted in life. For him, pure speculation without a concern for life is empty and useless. Thus he says, "Only the truth that edifies is the truth for thee."¹ This is the reason why he affirms that truth is subjectivity.

In his stress on the priority of the individual, Kierkegaard correctly recognizes the worth and uniqueness of the

¹Either/Or, II, 356-357.

individual. He insists that the individual exists "before God," and Christianity is a personal relationship to God. Man is not simply a child of nature; his uniqueness lies in the fact that he is spiritual. The freedom of human spirit is highly estimated by Kierkegaard. Therefore, he asserts, "The particular is higher than the universal."¹ In other words, man is not entirely limited by nature; he has the power of transcendence. As Reinhold Niebuhr states:

The self is primarily an active rather than contemplative organic unity. But it is more than an organic unity. It has the spiritual capacity of transcending both the natural process in which it is immersed and its own consciousness.²

Today much philosophy tends to become an academic pastime and pays little attention to the problem of human existence. Many thinkers tend to be contented in mere philosophical analysis or abstract argumentation. In this technological age men are dehumanized in various ways. In such a time Kierkegaard's philosophy is a valuable corrective, for he teaches us to be aware of the importance of personal existence. He reminds us that if philosophy is to be relevant to man, it must be concerned with life.

¹Fear, p. 65.

²Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 75-76.

2. Weaknesses

(1) There is an ambiguity in Kierkegaard's writings. As we have already pointed out, he uses the word "reason" in two different senses. One is that of traditional logic which, for him, is the proper function of reason. In this sense, reason is "indifferent to existence." The other sense is that of Hegelian logic which, in Kierkegaard's opinion, is a misuse of reason, for reason in this sense deals not only with thought but also with existence. It is unfortunate that Kierkegaard uses the word "reason" without identifying which sense of the word he means.

Kierkegaard's ambiguity is further shown in his statement that Christianity is subjectivity or truth is subjectivity. This statement leaves many of his readers wondering whether he has room for objectivity in Christianity. But, as we have shown, he does not deny the objective reality of faith, for he explicitly affirms the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Thus Kierkegaard's subjectivity cannot be identified with subjectivism; rather, it is a passionate interest in the object with which one confronts. However, his use of the word "subjectivity" without giving us a clear definition can be easily misinterpreted.

Moreover, an ambiguity is found in Kierkegaard's strong emphasis on the transcendence of God and the qualitative difference between God and man. This seems to assert that God and man are so different that any relationship between them is impossible. But this is not what Kierkegaard means. He maintains that God is also immanent in the sense that He becomes man in Jesus Christ.

God is Spirit. As Spirit God is related paradoxically to appearance (phenomenon), but paradoxically he can in turn come so near to reality that he is right in the midst of it, in the streets of Jerusalem.¹

This shows that God is not only far off but also near at hand; "He, the infinitely exalted, is quite close to thee."²

From these examples, it is obvious that there is a lack of clarity in Kierkegaard's writings. If he could have written more clearly and consistently, he might have avoided many misunderstandings in his readers.

(2) Kierkegaard minimizes the place of objectivity in Christianity. Although he recognizes the objective element of Christianity, he does not take it seriously. He insists that historical knowledge can at best offer us only approximation, and "an approximation, when viewed as a basis

¹The Last Years, p. 209.

²Christian Discourses, p. 174.

for eternal happiness, is wholly inadequate."¹ Moreover, Kierkegaard regards historical research as an endless one. "If the System still lacks a paragraph, if the speaker has still another argument up his sleeve, it follows that the decision is postponed."² Thus the objective reason prevents us from making decision, and "in this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith."³ Kierkegaard even goes so far as to insist that faith "must regard the proof as its enemy."⁴

Kierkegaard repeatedly states that Jesus Christ is the absolute paradox, for in this person God and man are inseparably united. However, he strangely overlooks the importance of the historical Jesus. For him, the historical detail of Jesus has little importance for faith.

The historical fact that the God has been in human form is the essence of the matter; the rest of the historical detail is not even as important as if we had to do with a human being instead of with the God.⁵

Furthermore, Kierkegaard writes:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: "We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant,"

¹Postscript, p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 115.

³Ibid., p. 50.

⁴Ibid., p. 131.

⁵Fragments, p. 130.

that he lived and taught in our community,
and finally died," it would be more than enough.¹

Kierkegaard's neglect of the historical Jesus is further shown in his statement that "the form of a servant means unrecognizableness (an incognito)."²

It is true, as Kierkegaard sees, that historical research can at best offer us only proximate knowledge. Nevertheless, we must be content with the highest probability attainable from historical study, and our task is to approximate more closely to the truth by a patient effort. If Christian faith is a response to God's revelation in history, it is necessary for us to understand as much as possible the nature of this historical event. In other words, Christians should take seriously the historical basis of their faith. Moreover, Kierkegaard's insistence that the historical Jesus is an incognito overlooks the meaning of the Word made flesh.

As D. M. Baillie rightly asserts:

If no revelation of the nature of God were to be found in the incarnate life, what would be the gain of believing that God therein became man? If the 'divine incognito' remains in this extreme form, what saving virtue is there in the dogma of the Incarnation.³

It is true, as Kierkegaard insists, that a mere historical knowledge of facts about Christ does not necessarily lead

¹Ibid, p. 1

²Training, p. 127.

³D. M. Baillie, God Was In Christ, p. 49.

one to faith. But it does not follow that the historical element of Christianity is unimportant.

(3) Kierkegaard's insistence that the difference between God and man is due to human sin alone seems to create a serious problem concerning his concept of paradox. He refers to Jesus Christ as the absolute paradox, for in this person the divine and the human are inseparably united. In order to be consistent with his view, Kierkegaard should assume that the humanity of Jesus is sinful; otherwise, the paradox of Christ would not be constituted. But Kierkegaard would not do so, for if Jesus is sinful in his humanity, he would not be able to be the Savior and Pattern of men. There is a further question. If sin is the cause of difference between God and man, this leaves one thing unexplained, namely, how the rest of the created universe is distinguished from God.

This shows that Kierkegaard's view of God and man is inadequate. He maintains that God and man are akin before the Fall. "If the God and man are absolutely different, this cannot be accounted for on the basis of what man derives from the God, for in so far they are akin."¹ It is the sin of man which causes the absolute unlikeness between God and man. "Their unlikeness must therefore be explained by what

¹Fragments, p. 58.

man derives from himself, or by what he has brought upon his own head."¹ This is surely the indication of the fact of human alienation from God. But Kierkegaard fails to see that the fundamental difference between God and man is ontological. In the Christian doctrine of creation we affirm that God is the Creator and men are creatures. God's being is unconditioned and self-sufficient, whereas creatures are conditioned and dependent. Creatures are dependent in the sense that they receive their existence and being from God, the source of all. Since creatures are dependent, they exist contingently. But God exists essentially and necessarily because His being comes from Himself and from nothing else at all. Thus the name of God is: "I am who I am."²

This shows us what the essential difference between God and man is. However, this does not deny that there is a continuity between God and man. The continuity is indicated in the Bible that man is created by God in His own image. Although the image of God has been blurred by human sin, it is not destroyed. Man is endowed by his Creator with sufficient ability to recognize the activity of God, and with the capacity to respond to the divine revelation. Without such human capacities, God's revelation would be in vain, for

¹Ibid.

²Exodus 3: 14.

nothing would be revealed to man.

Thus we know that though there is a difference between God and man, it does not deny the kinship between the two. In view of this, Kierkegaard's insistence on the infinite qualitative difference between God and man is unbiblical. In fact, he is inconsistent in holding that God is absolutely different from man, and at the same time that God has become a particular man in Jesus Christ. If God is qualitatively, absolutely different from man, we cannot imagine that He has any relationship to man. If Kierkegaard wants to maintain his view of Incarnation, he should give up his statement that God and man are qualitatively, absolutely different.

(4) Though Kierkegaard admits a function of reason in statements about faith, he does not give reason a sufficient place. His view of reason is limited to discerning, descriptive, attentive, and apologetic uses. Reason certainly has these uses. But we must say that reason has more than these. Kierkegaard fails to recognize that reason has relating and organizing uses. It is true that the divine revelation must be understood and grasped by faith. But we must insist that reason is required to relate the data of religious experience and organize them into a coherent whole.

Although Kierkegaard rightly recognizes that thought and existence cannot be identified, he overemphasizes the

difference between the two. In his view, thought and existence belong to two entirely different spheres, and therefore there is no relationship between the two. Here he ignores the fact that man both exists and thinks. There is no dualism of thought and existence in human life. It is true that subjective faith is required to understand existence; and God is to be known in the I-thou relationship. Kierkegaard is well aware that Christianity does not stop here, for Christianity is not a private or mystical religion. In Christianity a conceptualization or objectification of immediate religious experience is necessary so that the content of faith may become permanent and the gospel may be proclaimed to the world. This, however, shows that thought and existence are in fact closely related, though they are different. Existence provides for us the content, and thought the form. Existence without thought is blind, whereas thought without existence is empty.

Kierkegaard is right in maintaining that our knowledge of God is based on the self-disclosure of God. Apart from God's own self-revelation, human reason is incapable to apprehend the reality of God. However, Kierkegaard's restriction of our knowledge of God to His revelation in Jesus Christ alone is arbitrary. According to him, man is in a state of error due to his own guilt, and God, moved by love, becomes a man to be the Teacher who "gives the learner

the requisite condition and the Truth."¹ Here Kierkegaard fails to see the biblical witnesses of the general revelation. The Bible ~~says that~~ at all times God leaves Himself not without witness,² but has revealed something of Himself through "the things that are made,"³ through the universal moral conscience of man,⁴ and through the law, both the Torah of the Israelites to whom were committed the "oracles of God" and the law "written on the hearts" of the Gentiles, who thus "do by nature what the law requires."⁵ These passages of Scripture point to a knowledge of God prior to and apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is true that Jesus Christ is the most important revelation, for he not merely reveals God but is God. However, the general revelation does provide for us some knowledge of God, though it may be in a fragmentary manner. The human quest for God in nature does not mean that we rely on our human capacities alone. Rather, this is a response to the prior activity of God in the world.

In his criticism of Hegel, Kierkegaard has brought theology and philosophy into contact with each other. However, he lacks a sympathetic attitude toward philosophy.

¹Fragments, p. 19.

²Acts 14: 17.

³Romans 1: 20.

⁴Romans 3: 2.

⁵Romans 2: 14-15.

His attack on Hegelianism is in part justified in the sense that Hegel overemphasizes the power of human reason and overlooks the role of subjectivity in Christianity. However, it is unfortunate that Kierkegaard rejects Hegelianism altogether. It is true that Hegel is wrong in several points. For example, Hegel insists on the identity between God and man. This seems to ignore that there is a difference between God and man, namely that God is Creator and man is creature. In addition, Hegel maintains that man can prove the existence of God. This seems to overlook that God is unknown through man's personal relationship with Him, for rational argument can at best reach an abstract idea of God but not an existential reality of God. Moreover, if human reason could know God, this would make God's revelation in vain.

Nevertheless, we find that Hegel's view is a useful corrective to Kierkegaard's view. For example, although Hegel overemphasizes the identity between God and man, it is a helpful corrective to Kierkegaard, for the latter insists that God and man are absolutely, qualitatively different, and thus neglects the kinship between them. Moreover, although Hegel overemphasizes the role of objectivity, it is a helpful reminder to Kierkegaard, for the latter tends to overemphasize subjectivity and thus minimizes the role of objectivity in Christianity.

(5) Although Kierkegaard has a high estimate of the

individual, his category of the individual lacks the New Testament's idea of koinonia. One of his contributions is that he emphasizes the worth and uniqueness of the individual.

He writes:

In every one of my edifying works the theme of 'the individual' comes to evidence, and as officially as possible; but there the individual is what every man is or ought to be.¹

He further affirms that the category of the individual is "the principle of Christianity."² In this way, he rightly recognizes the choice and freedom of the individual, for man is not simply a race.

However, Kierkegaard fails to recognize that the Christian is not a solitary believer but an individual believer in the fellowship of sharing created by the power of the Holy Spirit. He overlooks the individual's need of the community. His view of the church is inadequate. In one occasion he even denies the value of the public worship.

This must be said: by ceasing to take part (if usually thou dost) in the public worship of God, as it now is, thou hast constantly one guilt the less, and that a great one.³

For Kierkegaard, the church is peripheral to the personal salvation of the individual. Moreover, he maintains that Christianity demands a breach with the world, "dying from the world."⁴

¹Point of View, p. 124.

²Ibid., p. 134.

³Attack, p. 259.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

Such a view is not in accord with the Bible on which Kierkegaard's theology is based. It is true that the salvation of the individual is important. But we must remember that the individual is a part of the community. According to the biblical faith, the salvation of the individual is not ultimate, but that of the world. God is encountered not by individuals in isolation, but by members of a community. The work of Christ is not only for me, but also for us. Kierkegaard emphasizes love so much, and yet he forgets that love cannot be realized except in the community. He fails to see that the individual is inseparably related to the community and is enriched by it. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's renunciation of the world is inconsistent with the biblical message, for the Christian is commanded to live in the world and to transform it into the kingdom of God. To be a Christian is not simply a matter of inwardness, but he must reach toward others and to actualize Christ's Lordship over the whole creation.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation which we have made on Kierkegaard's concept of paradox has led us to the following conclusions.

(1) Kierkegaard's paradox is a result of his reaction against Hegelianism and Christendom. According to Kierkegaard, Hegel overemphasizes the power of human reason and abolishes the distinction between God and man. Moreover, Christians in Christendom, under the influence of Hegelianism, regard religious faith as a purely intellectual matter, and thus religious passion or subjectivity, which is the essence of Christianity, is replaced by pure objectivity.

(2) Kierkegaard's task is therefore a corrective one. The corrective must not be mistaken for the whole or the norm. His one-sided emphasis to the truth of Christianity does not imply that he rejects the other side. A corrective is needed in order to regain the balance in a time when one idea has been carried too far.

(3) The presuppositions of Kierkegaard's thought are the Bible, revelation, the primacy of subjectivity, the priority of the individual, and the duality of thought and existence. His method is indirect communication; truth as subjectivity cannot be directly communicated, for it requires personal involvement.

(4) According to Kierkegaard, paradox is a category

referrring to the joint relationship between two opposite existential entities, such as the union of God and man in Christ. Paradox has the following characteristics. First, paradox is existential rather than logical, for it refers to existence, not thought. Secondly, paradox is absolute rather than relative, for it cannot be resolved into a higher unity by reason. Thirdly, paradox is beyond the comprehension of abstract reason, for it confronts man as a fact, which cannot be reduced to logical categories. Finally, since paradox is experienced as a fact, it can be only accepted by faith.

(5) In Kierkegaard's view, existence and thought belong to two entirely different realms. Existence is the object of faith, whereas thought is the object of reason. Although abstract reason has no direct access to faith, it has a function in language about faith. For Kierkegaard, reason can discern nonsense and prevent one from believing it. Reason can describe the data of religious experience. Further, reason can make one attentive to the historical basis of Christianity. Finally, reason can interpret Christian faith for a dialogue with contemporary culture. In other words, reason has discerning, descriptive, attentive, and apologetic uses.

(6) The purpose of Kierkegaard's paradox is to protest against Hegelian rationalism which deals not only with thought but also with existence. It is Kierkegaard's contention that Hegel distorts the very essence of Christianity. The attempt of Kierkegaard is not to reject but to limit reason within

the realm of thought. In doing so, he tries to make room for the subjectivity of faith.

(7) Paradox occupies a central place in Kierkegaard's theology. In our investigation, God, Christ, man, sin, and religiousness B (i.e. Christianity) are paradoxes in his theology. The paradox of God lies in the joint relationship between His transcendence and immanence. The paradox of Christ lies in the joint relationship between God and a particular man, or between his exaltation and lowliness. The paradox of man lies in the joint relationship between freedom and necessity, or between the eternal and the temporal. The paradox of sin lies in the joint relationship between the ethico-spiritual and the natural. The paradox of the forgiveness of sin lies in the joint relationship between the recognition of sin and the remission of sin. The paradox of religiousness B lies in the joint relationship between eternal happiness and something historical.

(8) Kierkegaard's concept of paradox has the following merits. First, Kierkegaard's paradox is an illumination of religious understanding and a protest against the rationalization of Christian faith. Secondly, Kierkegaard recognizes the depth of human sin and the need of the God-man, "the absolute paradox" as Saviour. Thirdly, his stress on subjectivity is a needed corrective to a time when objectivity is over-emphasized. Fourthly, he rightly reminds us that reason has

limits. Reason as an abstract logical function has no direct access to religion. Fifthly, he soundly asserts the multi-dimension of faith which includes the whole person in thinking, feeling, and willing. Sixthly, his distinction between thought and existence is helpful to the extent that these two are not to be confused or identified. This tells us that God is to be known through man's personal encounter with Him; and rational argument can reach at best an abstract idea of God but not an existential reality of God. Finally, he has made a contribution to philosophy by making it to be more concerned with human life.

(9) However, there are weaknesses in Kierkegaard's ~~own~~ concept of paradox. First, the ambiguity in his writings has caused many misunderstandings from many of his readers. Secondly, although he recognizes the objective element of Christianity, he does not take it seriously. Thirdly, his ~~view of the absolute~~ qualitative difference between God and man is unbiblical, for it does not do justice to the Christian understanding of creation and Incarnation. Moreover, he fails to see that the fundamental difference between God and man is due to creatureliness rather than sin. Fourthly, although he admits the function of reason in statements about religion, he does not give reason a sufficient place. He fails to recognize that reason has organizing and relating uses and that it can know something about God through His revelation

in nature. Although he recognizes the distinction between thought and existence, he fails to see that there is an interrelationship between them. Finally, he recognizes the uniqueness and worth of the individual, and yet he fails to see the importance of community in which the individual is a part.

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